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**The Limits of Local Politics: Local Socialism and the Local
Economy in the 1980s**

A Case Study of Sheffield's Economic Policies

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University, in the Urban and Regional Research Group.

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ABSTRACT

The analysis of local politics has too often been partial and one-sided. Dominant approaches to its study have tended to emphasise either the institutions of local government, or the logic of the local state, or (more recently) its relationship to localities. This thesis seeks to bring together a range of different approaches in ways which make it easier to explore the processes of local politics, acknowledging that no single approach is likely to provide all the answers. But it argues that those debates which build links between politics and geography, around the notion of locality, are particularly helpful, as long as they do not lose sight of politics within the state (as expressed, for example, in Rhodes' discussion of policy networks), and (following Duncan, Goodwin, Halford, and Savage) as long as localities are not understood as coherent expressions of underlying relations. Following a critical discussion of the locality debates (associated with the ESRC's Changing Urban and Regional System programme), it is suggested that notions of local growth coalition (as developed by Cox and Mair) and urban corporatism (as developed by Harvey) may be helpful in analysing change at local level. This suggestion is taken further through a case study of the development of 'local socialism' and of local economic policies in Sheffield in the 1980s. The concluding chapter seeks to set out the lessons which can be drawn from the Sheffield experience, relating back to the earlier arguments, as well as suggesting ways of integrating those conclusions with the analyses of the state developed by Jessop at a more abstract level.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Capitalism is a global system. As a result many of the most important decisions seem to be taken in the board rooms of multinational companies, or are explained as the consequences of the impersonal operation of market forces, for which no individual or group of individuals can be held responsible. Political actions look less and less able to influence the operation of this system because there are no effective international political structures, and most individual countries are left to find their own accommodations within an increasingly hostile economic environment. Governments are forced to compete to attract companies looking for sites to develop, offering packages of land, financial incentives and promises of disciplined labour forces. They read the entrails of economic statistics to assess whether they need to raise or lower interest rates, decrease or increase levels of public spending.

In such a world it is, perhaps, difficult to understand why anyone would be interested in local politics. If national governments are weak and international structures underdeveloped, then surely it is difficult not to conclude that local politics must merely be an irrelevant sideshow. Yet in many of the countries of Western Europe, at least, local government has

been at the centre of major controversies throughout the 1980s (see, e.g., King and Pierre 1990 and Pickvance and Preteceille 1991). Just when it looks as if economic processes are truly global, local governments have increasingly become involved in the development of their own economic policies.

In principle perhaps such an outcome is not as paradoxical as it might at first appear. At a theoretical level it is not difficult to see how moves towards globalisation might also lead to an extension of local initiative, precisely because it undermines the position of national states and makes it much more difficult to understand what a national economy looks like: if the economic boundaries between nations are becoming increasingly porous, then it becomes less easy to discount the importance of local economies just because the boundaries between them are difficult to specify. Places may also be defined by their residents in terms of their relation to global rather than simply 'local' processes (including, for example, links to cultures based in other countries) yet arguably, too, in a context of global uncertainty, it may become more important to be clearer about security and identity at local level, where social interaction is more possible (see, e.g., Massey 1991a for a discussion of the notion of a global sense of place, Robins 1990 for a discussion of globalisation. Cooke 1990

discusses similar questions).

These concerns provide the context for the discussion which follows.

It is possible to accept the general proposition that local and global processes and the interactions between them are vitally important in shaping the world in which we live, but it is less easy to understand the implications of such a view for the practice and development of activities at local level. In order to develop this understanding it is necessary to explore the balance of different influences which shape what is possible and the extent to which locally based interests (whether economic, cultural or political) can themselves influence events and create new opportunities. The argument which follows is principally concerned with the operation of local politics, and in particular with attempts to develop alternative forms of local economic policy in an area of traditional or declining industry; in part because this is the clearest arena in which local interests can be seen to find formal expression, and in part because globalisation might also be expected to encourage significant changes in the organisation and role of the local state.

The argument starts with an assessment of existing approaches to the problem of local politics, looking first at those which dominate in the field of local government studies, before turning to theories of the local

state. One of the weaknesses of such approaches is that they rarely consider the significance of the label 'local' in the studies they develop. It is simply taken for granted as a defining characteristic of an area of study. This leads into more recent arguments, mainly from debates within the discipline of geography, which explore the meaning and value of terms such as 'local' or 'locality'. In turn, many of these debates show little understanding of the significance of theories of politics or the state, so it is suggested that it is necessary to bring the different approaches together, with the help of theories which utilise notions such as 'growth coalitions' and 'urban corporatism'.

In order to explore the most effective ways of doing this a case study of local socialist initiatives in the field of economic policy is developed. These initiatives are set within the wider context of political change within the U.K. in the 1980s, before being explored in more detail in the case of Sheffield. The moves from radical rhetoric in the early 1980s to the language (and practice) of 'public-private' partnership at the end of the decade are charted, and the implications of the shifts are assessed. Stress is placed on the need to set the Sheffield experience in the context of the restructuring of state and politics through the 1980s, linking the processes of local politics (including professional politics) to these wider

shifts.

Finally, more general conclusions are drawn about the position of local politics and the local state within the structures of capitalism in the last decades of the twentieth century. In particular, it is argued that whilst there is scope for the development of independent initiatives at local level, the local state is increasingly the site of corporatist political arrangements, within which elected local government is playing the part of co-ordination and providing infrastructural support. This conclusion is consistent with the arguments linking the global and the local which are raised earlier, since it suggests that the key levels at which business interests are likely to be involved are international (e.g. European) and local (or regional). One implication of this is that apparent decentralisation of responsibility and political representation may not be accompanied by increased 'autonomy' for local government and the local state, both because it may be accompanied by tighter control from the centre, but also - more important - because it may imply greater influence for business interests (whether strictly local or the local expression of wider interests).

Chapter 2. Local government, local politics and the local state.

If the experience of the 1980s is any guide, then debates about local government reform are likely to remain heated but confused, with conclusions which remain uncertain and the continual promise of more 'reforms' which are likely to resolve little. In order to move beyond the agenda set by the attempts at 'reform' introduced at the centre it is necessary to look further than the apparently straightforward descriptions of conflict between central and local government, which encourage academics to line up with one side or the other. The argument which follows is structured in ways which are intended to make this possible, leading from a discussion of academic debates focused on notions of the local state, locality and the possibility of forms of urban or local corporatism, to a consideration of the political and organisational frameworks within which local governments and local states operate, before turning to a particular case study through which processes of interaction can be explored in ways which allow tentative conclusions to be drawn about the nature of local political arrangements at the start of the 1990s.

2.1 From local government to local state and back again

Until the 1970s the academic analysis of local government in the United Kingdom was largely conducted through straightforward, apparently commonsense, case studies of policy formation and the institutional arrangements were generally taken for granted. The main criticisms focused on the calibre of councillors and officers. Within this tradition local government was only 'local' in the sense that it was not national - the necessary administrative consequence of a welfare state which had to be delivered at local level - and was grafted on to an existing structure of local government, bequeathed from the nineteenth century (Keith-Lucas and Richards 1978). Indeed, in the 1960s it was the legacy of the past (including its democratic basis) which was blamed for the perceived inefficiencies of the system. Dearlove neatly summarises these arguments, "Most commentators have **described** the system as democratic, inefficient, subject to massive and increasing central control, and dominated by councillors (and officers) of declining calibre" (Dearlove 1979, p.22). What was needed, it was argued, was better management and

more appropriate organisation in larger units to meet the technical requirements of service delivery.

Academic analysis tended to be somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, many writers in the field - such as Stewart 1971 and 1974 - shared the view that substantial reorganisation was required, but at the same time they were committed to the existing institutions and professions of local government. In practice much of their work focused on providing more or less direct assistance to those being researched. The literature was dominated by writing oriented towards advising officers and councillors how to operate on particular issues with little analysis of how local politics worked. Dunleavy has criticised much of the academic writing on local government in the 1960s and 1970s for being written from the point of view of the 'inside dopest', that is based on information drawn from close relationships with political actors, rather than an attempt to analyse their behaviour: with the role of "mediating the objective perceptions and valuable insights of local politicians to a wider audience ...or that of policy advisor, removed from the routines of day-to-day administration, capable of taking a larger view and perhaps versed in a more sophisticated appreciation of democratic theory, but fundamentally

concerned with the same goals and operating in the same ideological frame as local government itself" (Dunleavy 1980, p.7). Dunleavy's criticism retains much force, and is reinforced by the extent to which writing in the field continues to come from those who rely on close relationships with local government for training and consultancy contracts. Whilst there is no suggestion of direct corruption in this relationship, it does imply a rather narrow focus substantially driven by the concerns of those with whom continuing relationships have to be maintained (see also Dearlove's sharp critique 1979, pp.258-9). Even the new initiatives of the 1980s (often summarised as 'local socialism') were generally discussed in much the same way, with academics reporting on them and offering support, rather than analysis of political processes (see, e.g. Boddy and Fudge 1984b, Chs 1 and 4-9).

One result of the dominance of local government experts (associated with major academic institutions such as the Institute of Local Government Studies in Birmingham and the School for Advanced Urban Studies in Bristol) seems to have been that other traditions have been squeezed into secondary positions. Even pluralist analysis has existed at the margins, often justifying itself in terms which emphasise access to or membership

of the policy communities under discussion. Both Gyford (1976) and Alexander (1982), for example, start by noting their direct involvement as councillors, and Blowers (1980) builds on his experience as Chair of Bedfordshire's Environmental Services Committee. But pluralist approaches have, at least, had a degree of legitimation within the political science tradition, and local politics has been seen as an arena in which broader questions associated with those approaches could be explored, particularly in the context of (often rich) case studies of specific authorities (and, sometimes, by implication, places) (see, e.g. Dearlove 1973, Hampton 1970, and Newton 1976b). Although these analyses were able to problematise (and politicise) otherwise rather neutral interpretations of local politics, they retained some of the broader weaknesses of pluralist analysis. In particular, although they were able to investigate party politics and the politics of interest groups, they were rarely able to get behind the formal structures of council and officers, to the extent that Newton, for example, pointed to the significance of officers in the decision-making process, but was unable to do much more than comment that: "much of the current literature on officer-member relations overemphasizes the power of officers and underemphasizes that

of members" (Newton 1976b, p. 164). Whilst the importance of intra-organisational politics might be formally acknowledged, it was, in practice, largely ignored.

In addition, pluralist approaches found it difficult to deal adequately with the wider economic and political context within which local politics has to be placed. Although - as Newton and Dearlove did - it was possible for them to point to imperfections within simple pluralist models, highlighting inequalities in access to power, it was more difficult for them to identify systematic forms of exclusion, without moving substantially away from the basic models. Yet, as Offe notes, it is only by integrating the analysis of organisation, "global social system" and the behaviour of social actors that it is possible to develop "a sufficiently complex explanation" of the operation of interest groups (Offe 1981, p. 123).

One way of doing this might have been to take up and develop community power analysis, but this was slow to cross the Atlantic, with Saunders (1980) being a rare exception (although some other case studies also moved in this direction with their emphasis on links between political and economic elites at local level - e.g. Blowers 1984, Clements 1969, Lee

1963). Saunders' analysis of Croydon highlights the extent to which certain issues are simply removed from the political agenda, as well as the importance of informal debates within local elites, although he later comments that "in retrospect" his analysis supports a notion of "imperfect pluralism in which business interests had achieved dominance over particular issues of direct relevance to them" rather than one in which elites determine policy across the board (Saunders 1986, p. 34). In any case, it is important to note that such forms of analysis are still likely to underestimate the ways in which local political processes interact with national economic and political structures, which, as Dunleavy suggests, may be more important than local ones, even on issues such as the development of council housing (Dunleavy 1981, pp. 346-351).

It is in this context that one might have expected marxist influenced literature to be most helpful, since it starts from a position which stresses the importance of the wider political economy. But, most marxist writing in the U.K. in the 1960s and early 1970s effectively dismissed local government as a significant area for intervention (or debate). It was merely another aspect of capitalism and the capitalist state, allowing little scope for political variation. Miliband, for example, criticised

pluralist analysis of local politics in the U.S.A. arguing that, "As in national terms, business at local and state level is not only at an enormous competitive advantage in getting those things it wants; it is also uniquely well placed to prevent those things from being done or even seriously discussed and considered, which it does *not* want" (Miliband 1969 pp. 175). And in the UK he concluded that, "Here too the largest part by far of the population remains for ever ruled by others who may or may not have welfare and radical orientations, who may or may not combine these orientations with bureaucratic propensities, but who are, in any case, *them*" (Miliband 1969, p. 178).

In the 1970s, however, there were a series of attempts to theorise and understand the nature of local government - or what was often called the 'local state' - from marxist or marxist influenced perspectives. Here the theoretical focus was generally on the identification of broad conceptual divisions, although often backed up by rich empirical material. The most powerful of this work - generally drawing its inspiration from the structuralist marxism associated with Althusser and Poulantzas - sought to identify clearly separate objects of scientific study - hence 'local state' (Cockburn 1977, O'Connor 1973) or 'urban politics' (Castells

1977, 1978, Dunleavy 1980), rather than the incoherent and everyday 'local government'. For Cockburn the key role of the 'local state', within the broader framework of the capitalist state, was the management of the community, which was defined as the reproduction of labour power. A similar division was identified by O'Connor, for whom the local state was principally concerned with the management of social consumption. Castells and Dunleavy focused on collective consumption as the defining characteristic of the 'urban'.

The strength of all these approaches lay in the ways in which they brought issues of concern within local government to the centre of wider debates. No longer was that level of government (whatever it was labeled) simply a backwater of little relevance to political life. Instead, not only could it only properly be understood as part of a wider system of political economy, but that wider system itself could only be understood if the local state (or urban politics) was recognised as a crucial part of it. At the same time these theorists moved away from models which explained all aspects of the state simply in terms of the unfolding of the logic of capitalist development, while retaining a perspective which located developments within the wider constraints of capitalist development.

Their weakness, however, lay in the difficulty they had in identifying political processes. There is a large gap between the wider processes and abstractions identified and the actual practices of local politics. Not only is there little reference to intra-organisational politics, but the very notion of the 'local' is absent. 'Local' government, the local state or 'urban' politics in these models is a layer or level of the state or politics, rather than a series of activities identified with any particular place. Place - at least at a theoretical level - seems irrelevant, except insofar as the political processes identified have to have some spatial expression. However, because the active pursuit of politics cannot be discussed outside of time and space, the importance of place receives implicit recognition at the level of empirical research, in the consideration of particular cases (e.g. Cockburn's analysis is linked to a case study of Lambeth, and Dunleavy undertook a detailed analysis based on a case study of Newham, Dunleavy 1981). But the case studies are being used - as Dunleavy argues, following Mitchell - "to establish *necessary* dependencies amongst the elements in a given context...case studies are concerned to establish logical relations...The case demonstrates the operation of general principles in a defined context (the real context)" (Dunleavy 1981, p. 199).

Paradoxically, however, although the cases are principally intended to confirm the logic of already existing theoretical structures, in practice they help to undermine them by introducing locally based political dynamics, indicating, if not yet explicitly acknowledging, their significance. Despite the emphasis in these writings on theoretical development, an implicit dichotomy is developed between theory and practice in ways which leave the practice relatively untheorized. And as long as cases are used primarily as ways of exploring and identifying **necessary** relations, then the importance of place - of difference between places - will tend to be undervalued because it implies uniqueness, rather than universality. Sayer makes this point very clearly: "In social systems we have a continually changing jumble of spatial relations, not all of them involving objects which are causally indifferent to one another. *So even though concrete studies may not be interested in spatial form per se, it must be taken into account if the contingencies of the concrete and the differences they make to outcomes are to be understood*" (Sayer 1984, p. 131).

Despite their attempts to move away from what they see as the failings of structural marxism, similar problems arise with the dual state

thesis developed by Cawson and Saunders (Cawson and Saunders 1983, Saunders 1982, 1984 and 1986). The argument here contrasts national and local politics and identifies functional divisions between different levels of the state. Within this approach, the national level is said to be mainly concerned with issues relating to major class and functional interests - in particular (although not only) capital and labour. Decisions on issues related to production and the economy are taken at that level and bargaining is between major interests. In this model, too, the local state concerns itself principally with issues of social consumption (and, possibly, the provision of urban infrastructure) in part because Saunders initially drew on O'Connor's taxonomy of state spending and Offe's distinctions between what he called the 'allocative' and 'productive' functions of the capitalist state to justify the division he identified (O'Connor 1973 and Offe 1975 and 1984).

But the dual state thesis also goes further, to suggest that because of its focus on social consumption the local state is more open, more pluralist and less corporatist than the national state. In its later formulations the thesis moved away from any explicit reliance on O'Connor "in favour of a distinction between the 'politics of production' and the

'politics of consumption'" (Saunders 1986, p. 9). Because the local state is not responsible for the issues which are of central concern to business (which are dealt with at national level) there is a degree of space for initiative at local level which can be utilised by local groups. A distinction is made between 'class politics' - effectively the politics of production - and 'sectoral politics' - effectively the politics of consumption. It is this which defines or makes possible the 'relative autonomy' of the local state, both in the sense that it is not merely the creature of central government, and - perhaps more important - that it does not simply operate as an expression of the 'needs' of capital. The model implies that at national level structural factors effectively determine political decision-making (class politics), whilst at 'local' level diverse political interest groups (sectoral politics) have a more or less direct influence on policy-making, through a sort of 'imperfect pluralism'.

The dual state thesis is not presented as offering a necessary set of relations between national and local state, or even one which explains every division of functional responsibility between the two levels. It is, rather, according to Saunders to be understood as an ideal type, whose value should be assessed in terms of its usefulness as a basis for

empirical research. For its supporters, it is said to raise questions rather than settling them (Saunders 1986, pp 13-17). Unfortunately, however, this expression of of the theory is rather disingenuous. However often it is claimed that it is an ideal type rather than a model, in practice rather stronger conclusions are frequently drawn. For example, Saunders argues that there is a division within British politics between areas of social consumption within which "policies are still by and large resolved in the competitive arena of democratic politics" and areas of social investment which have "been insulated by means of corporate bias" (Saunders 1982, p. 60). In other words, despite the emphasis on ideal types, it is not long before the move is made from type to 'reality', yet when this elision is criticised, the response comes that the thesis has been misunderstood and misrepresented: it is, after all, merely an ideal type, a heuristic device for aiding understanding and encouraging empirical research.

In theoretical terms, one of the key problems of the method adopted by Saunders is that the choice of a particular ideal type is always difficult to justify, because it starts from assumptions which are not clearly stated - for example, in this case it arises from "the questions in which we are interested" (Saunders 1982, p. 58). In other words, in choosing

which ideal types to develop (out of the many which could be developed) the main justification is practical relevance. But this leaves the underlying principles of choice - and (as Bhaskar notes) the sources of the values underlying them - unstated. Bhaskar draws an analogy with the natural sciences to suggest that theoretical interests are a necessary basis for choice: "Thus while it is practical interests which determine which out of the infinite number of possible compounds of carbon are studied, it is theoretical interests which motivate the identification of its electronic structure...There is nothing in the infinite variety of the surface of the social cosmos to necessitate a difference in principle in the structure of the search for explanatory mechanisms" (Bhaskar 1979, p. 71). In the case of the dual state thesis, there seems to have been a sleight of hand involved, in which the language of neo-marxism is used as a starting point, drawing on the theoretical divisions provided by Offe and O'Connor, and then rejected to allow the thesis itself much more flexibility in the 'real' world of local politics.

Even where the dual state thesis has been used as a starting point for empirical research, the results are not very encouraging. Saunders' own work on the regional level of the state (Saunders 1985; see also Duncan

and Goodwin 1988 Ch 7) suggests that identifying the regional level as a means of shifting production issues from local (more pluralist) to more corporate forms of politics is not very helpful, particularly in the wake of privatisation policies which have simply removed many 'regional institutions' (such as the water authorities and public transport) out of the political arena. Blowers' analysis of the politics of development and pollution in Bedfordshire also uses the dual state thesis as a theoretical starting point, and appears rather more successful in showing its value, noting the greater power of producer interests in the decision-making process, but also pointing to the significance of consumer interests at local level. But the results of Blowers' researches are also equivocal, because they suggest that producer interests are powerful at local as well as national (and regional) levels (Blowers 1984). Despite his later preference for neo-pluralism, Saunders' own research also interestingly points to the increased significance of 'corporatist' modes of mediation at local level, particularly in the extent of representation of business interests, but possibly also in a decline of representation for traditional welfare state professionals (Saunders 1984, p.35). If using the dual state thesis as a starting point begins to call into question the divisions it

purports to identify then it may represent a theoretical cul de sac rather than a way into theoretically informed research. There is a danger that all the theory does is to add a layer of generalising legitimacy, to what may be entirely contingent relationships (to be found in particular local governments at a particular time).

The best known theories of the local state, whether developed by Castells, Cockburn, or Saunders, all identified the local state with the politics of welfare (whether expressed in terms of the reproduction of labour power, collective consumption, or social consumption). Each started from an apparently necessary set of divisions within capitalism as the basis for drawing these conclusions. But it was increasingly clear that such logical divisions were difficult to sustain, either empirically or theoretically. Empirically, evidence was soon accumulated which suggested that other issues were also of interest to existing local states. Planning policies and the politics they involved, in particular, were felt to fit rather uneasily with such models (see, e.g., Flynn 1983, Reade 1987, Simmie 1981 and 1985) and there was a growing interest in the development of local economic policies (see Ch. 7), which also suggested a different focus for the local state. At a theoretical level, it was suggested

by some that the local state might be better understood in terms which stressed its role in the politics of development and land use (see, e.g., Logan and Molotch 1987, Smith 1988) or social control (see, e.g. Gottdiener 1987 Ch. 6).

The notion of the local state as it is used in academic debate is no longer dependent on an analysis which starts from the identification of functional divisions between levels of the state. But this also means that the value of using the term has become less clear: it tends to be used in sociological and marxist influenced literature, and to be avoided in much political science literature and (not surprisingly) in the literature of local government studies. In the course of the 1980s, the criticism of local state theories of various kinds encouraged a move back to the language of local and central government. Stoker simply seems to use the terms local state and local government interchangeably (Stoker 1988, Ch. 10), while Rhodes explicitly rejects the notion of the local state, arguing that it adds little to theorisations of sub-central governments, the term which he prefers (Rhodes 1988, pp. 97-98). At the end of the decade the dominant approach once more focused on local government rather than local state, with an emphasis on the extent to which its position had been undermined

by the centre (see, e.g., Crouch and Marquand 1989, especially the Introduction) and the extent to which new possibilities had been opened up for officers and councillors by the experience of the 1980s (see, for example, Brooke 1989a and b on the notion of the 'enabling' authority, and the debates in Stewart and Stoker 1989).

The value of such moves (particularly in the writing of Stoker and Rhodes) is that it is possible to connect more clearly with contemporary political debates, while retaining a commitment to wider theorisations of politics. But giving up attempts to theorise local government as part of the state carries with it the danger that the notion of local government will be left as unproblematic and unproblematised. It becomes easy to slip back into discussions of officers and politicians in a largely untheorised way which makes it difficult to explore the broader power relations within local government and surrounding it and to acknowledge the political significance of private and public sector agencies outside the direct control of elected governments. Yet agencies of this sort are becoming increasingly important at local level. One of the strengths of the notion of the local state is that it makes it easier to locate local political arrangements within a wider social environment, and to explore both how

they help to shape that environment and are shaped by it. It also makes it easier to avoid an instrumental view of state or governmental power because of its stress on the state as a social relation or 'institutional ensemble': as Jessop notes, it is not the state which has power, instead "state power should be seen as a form-determined condensation of the balance of political forces" (Jessop 1990b, p. 167).

Here, too, it is apparent that the choice of terms may also imply a move away from forms of theorising which are concerned to explore the significance of the state as a 'capitalist state'. If the term 'government' is used instead, the implication is that there is little connection between wider social relations and political arrangements. The neo-marxist theorists of the 1970s tended to present the 'local state' as a more or less direct expression of capitalist interests at local level, but if Jessop's formulation is used instead, then it becomes easier to understand that may still be useful to see the state as a capitalist state. He argues that: "The state is a strategically selective terrain which can never be neutral among all social forces and political projects; but any bias is always tendential and can be undermined or reinforced by appropriate strategies. For, within the strategically selective limits established by state structures and

operating procedures, the outcome of state power also depends on the changing balance of forces engaged in political action both within and beyond the state" (Jessop 1990b, p. 353). Although there is no absolute logic of capital to be unambiguously translated into state form, or political initiative, the structural constraints implied for politics by the capitalist state form are real enough: above all in the way in which the division between private economy and the state means that the latter remains dependent on the private sector as the source of economic well-being (Jessop 1990b, pp. 178-180).

2.2 From local state to local politics

One characteristic of all the theories of the local state (and related approaches) is, as we have indicated, that they make little explicit allowance for local factors. Indeed, in some versions the significance of such factors is directly dismissed. Dunleavy, for example, stresses the structural context of urban politics and non-local sources of urban policy change, before going on explicitly to question the importance of local politics (Dunleavy 1980, chs. 3, 4 and 5). But this theoretical purity is

generally diluted as soon as discussion moves towards the operation of local governments and attempts are made to give recognition to notions of 'relative autonomy'. Then locally based phenomena are allowed to influence and sometimes effectively to shape political behaviour. Although the theoretical starting points make this difficult, in practice attempts were made to explore both the constraints and possibilities of independent action by and through the local state, and this brought in local factors almost unasked. Attempts were being made to explore the extent and possible meaning of 'relative autonomy' at the level of the local state.

In many ways, their conclusions seemed to be rather pessimistic:

.Benington (1976) complained that techniques of corporate management were taking power away from backbench councillors and local communities; Cockburn (1977) argued that the local state was best understood as a subsidiary part of a wider (national) capitalist state, reinforcing the power of capital through local welfare provision; for Castells (1977) the local state merely responded to the demands of capital in ensuring the reproduction of labour power through the provision of collective consumption goods and services; Dearlove (1979) maintained that the 1972 Local Government Act was designed to take access to power

away from working class communities and instead encourage the development of more 'efficient' technical approaches, supervised by middle class councillors; even Dunleavy (1980) and Saunders (1980) only seemed able to allow a degree of 'local' autonomy by granting power to local political elites (networks of influence) whose members might disagree with each other, but which nevertheless continued to exclude other groups.

Yet there was another side to these analyses, confirmed in their opposition to changes which were said to be reducing the scope for local autonomy. If changes were being introduced to reduce the power of the working class, or groups oppressed on grounds of gender or race, then the implication was that these groups must have had some access to power in the past. And, if properly mobilised, there might be some scope for political intervention by them in the future, too. In other words, politics could not be reduced to structural factors, but might even generate sufficient pressure to challenge, or undermine existing structures. The political implications of these writings were relatively unexplored at the time. The main criticism made of Cockburn's approach, for example, was that it was excessively 'functionalist' in explaining the changing role of the 'local state' as stemming from its (necessary) role within capitalism

(see, e.g., Duncan and Goodwin 1982); similarly, Castells was initially criticised for utilising an Althusserian structuralism which allowed little scope for political agency (Lowe 1986, p. 12). Yet the main message to be drawn from these texts was not one of fatalism, nor of a crude anti-statism, as might have been expected from such criticisms. On the contrary, it was that there were opportunities for autonomous action by groups of people working within, and 'client' groups operating outside, the state machine which could point towards alternative ways of organising society.

So, for Castells (well before his auto-critique in 1983), the notion of collective consumption allowed the possibility of identifying a whole range of autonomous social and political movements which might be able to challenge the state. He argued, for example, that in France in the mid 1970s the left had been able to develop broad campaigns over issues of collective consumption as part of a drive to take over political power at council level. The success of these campaigns was partly a prelude to national electoral victory, but he suggested that it also provided a basis on which to implement radical local political programmes (Castells 1978). In its early formulations the possibility of urban social movements suggested

a basis on which alliances could be formed, led by the working class, and ultimately capable of overthrowing capitalism. In later formulations, it was suggested that urban movements made it possible to build broader, cross-class, more pluralist alliances (Lowe 1986, pp. 24-26).

From a rather different perspective Cockburn (1977) argued that there was a real possibility of opening up a politics based on notions of social reproduction and community, in which women would play a central part in undermining the logic of the local state, in developing politics at "the point of collective reproduction" (Cockburn 1977, p. 167. See also pp177-183). Instead of believing that the state was an institution which could only be transformed by full frontal assault, it was argued that what was needed was a multiplicity of campaigns, of 'counter-organisation', involving employees and those they were supposed to serve through the welfare state. "Because the state is a form of relations, its workers and clients, if they do not struggle against it, help to perpetuate it...Our struggle against it must be a continual one, changing shape as the struggle itself, and the state's response to it, create new opportunities" (London-Edinburgh Weekend Return Group 1979, pp.48-49).

But within these approaches, local elements remained reluctant

participants. They were in a sense residuals: when the structural arguments could not explain what happened, then local factors had to be taken into account. Little attempt was made to specify the local, or to assess its significance within the models. It was simply as if an arena was identified within which politics was possible, and very often the writers themselves were active in it. There remained a series of crucial difficulties with these formulations which were not resolved before many of the key theorists, in England and France, themselves became involved in the state about which they had previously written, or engaged with through various community and other campaigns. Saunders noted that Castells' theory of the state failed "to relate structures to practices and the functional requirements of the system to the effects of class struggle" and this is a weakness which underlies much local state theory, even when the importance of political practice is acknowledged (Saunders 1981, p. 190).

Although there were broad statements about 'counter-organisation' somehow "prefiguring socialist organisation within the struggle itself" (London-Edinburgh Weekend Return Group 1979, p. 62), for example, it was never quite clear when this multitude of interventions would stop the state being a capitalist state. Nor was it clear how taking over the

'machine' of the state through local electoral success would fit into the analysis, since most of the theorising was based on the notion of continued oppositional practice within the state or communities. Cockburn had been particularly scathing of those who viewed the officer structure of local government as a neutral machine which could be steered in whatever direction the politicians chose - "obediently in the command of whoever sits in the electoral driver's seat" (Cockburn 1977, p.2). But this did not solve the problem of what to do when, in the early 1980s (to everybody's surprise), the left actually took over that seat, in some places at least. Nor was it clear from this debate what scope actually existed to carry through fundamental change at local level: there was some understanding that there were constraints and opportunities but the limits of each remained to be determined. It was also understood that precisely because the state was a set of relations, rather than a 'machine' or 'institution', it was easy to be drawn into processes of decision-making whose terms were effectively determined by interests opposed to those of the left. It was less clear how this might be avoided.

2.3 In what sense local?

This is one of the reasons why the need to identify the local - what makes local government, the local state or local government **local** - becomes so important (see also Duncan and Goodwin 1988, p. xiv). It is necessary to provide some framework which makes it possible to avoid either simply listing a series of initiatives and labelling them 'local', or apparently deducing them from first principles in the ways that the theorists of the local state do. In doing this it is useful to draw on a different set of debates, in particular focusing on those drawn from geography, rather than political science or sociology. Here, at least, spatial differentiation is more than the unfortunate expression of empirical reality and it is explicitly recognised from the start that "the 'spatial' is not just an outcome; it is also part of the explanation" (Allen and Massey 1984, p. 4), even if the precise implications of this recognition for political behaviour and organisation remain uncertain.

So, what would it mean to take the **local** aspects of local government or the local state seriously? At its most basic, such an approach might simply acknowledge that there are differences between different places -

that there is a degree of spatial variation. Such differences could exist for a number of reasons. Many centrally determined state policies, for example, will be delivered differently in different places, although the rules under which the policies are delivered may be the same everywhere. It is likely to surprise no-one that more social security benefits are paid in areas whose population includes higher numbers of unemployed, or other potential claimants, although the significance of concentrations of this sort is often missed in more generalised discussion of levels of welfare benefit. National industrial policies, too, are likely to affect different places in different ways (see, for example, Massey and Meegan 1978, Cochrane and Dicker 1977 and CDP 1977a, Section 4 which highlight the differential impact of the industrial policies of the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in the inner cities). Even those policies introduced with specific areas as targets - such as regional policy and policies for the inner cities - often have unpredicted (if not unpredictable) impacts inside and outside their target areas (see, e.g., CDP 1977a, Section 2 and Hudson 1986). But, however important it is to note these localised impacts of national policies, that does not yet tell us very much about the independent significance of local factors.

It is, of course, important to understand that the UK is not an isotropic surface, with activities and people evenly distributed about it, although that often appears to be the assumption on which policies are made, or at least justified. Once the existence of spatial variation is accepted, then it must also be clear that no national policy is likely to have a spatially neutral impact. But that is not yet the same as suggesting that local factors may be of significance in themselves. The acceptance of difference might simply imply that by feeding in enough data and using the appropriate formulae it should be possible to identify the impact of any policy in each identifiable area.

For initiatives to be understood as 'local' ones it becomes necessary to move beyond the simple identification of differences between places. They need in some way to reflect interaction between factors at local level which go towards the formation of particular political processes. In this sense one would also expect them to be more than mechanical responses or adjustments to the changing demands of capitalist enterprises in the face of (or in the process of) industrial restructuring. It is the ability to identify a process of interaction between broader national and international developments and local understandings which is

essential. For it to be useful to describe initiatives as 'local' (in however limited a way) one would expect them to relate to locally generated pressures and to be capable of translation into policies which can have some effect locally, even in the absence of shifts in national policy (although attempting to change the direction of national policy might itself be one of the aims of locally based political initiatives). In other words, there needs to be scope for a degree of independent policy formulation and implementation at local level, whether understood purely as a level of government or as the political expression of 'locality'. According to Dickens et al, "A local social process worthy of the name must refer to something active and specific to localities, although not necessarily unique to one locality, rather than local deviations to national level processes" (Dickens et al 1985, p. 18), and the point is equally valid for local political processes.

The importance of 'locality' as an issue is one which until recently it has been all too easy to ignore in the study of local government and the local state. It has been easy to accept, on the one hand, that all places are different and so to engage in a detailed listing of what is done in those different places, while at the same time believing that the important

factors which determine what happen locally are decided nationally or internationally, or that there is a permanent process of convergence at work which is making different places more alike. Dominant approaches to local government and the local state have tended to operate with a conveniently dualist view of the world, in which apparently sophisticated theories are used to deal with general tendencies of development and yet a highly differentiated (and largely untheorised and commonsense) view is taken of particular local states. At local level empirical detail may substitute for theoretical analysis. The notion of 'locality', in some formulations at least, should help to bring these two levels together by showing how broad economic and social processes (e.g. economic restructuring) operate across localities, changing their nature, but also how the nature of local economies and social structures may also influence and feed back into those processes.

Of course, this does not mean that researchers should concentrate on cataloguing an endless series of unique experiences. Certainly every place is unique, but each is also part of a wider system which helps to shape it, and many apparently 'local' phenomena relate equally directly to others at national or global levels. Allen and Massey (1984, pp. 8-10) use the the

terms "uniqueness and interdependence" to express these continuing relations and processes of interaction, although it remains difficult to translate such a broad statement, which is a useful starting point, into more developed theoretical terms. The difficulty of this task should not be allowed to discourage attempts to undertake it more systematically.

These issues are at the heart of Massey's 'Spatial Divisions of Labour' (1984), which is particularly effective in showing the ways in which the same processes (e.g. of industrial decentralisation) find different expressions and have different implications in different places, particularly for structures of class and gender. These changing expressions of social structure are important in the consideration of local politics, at least insofar as they help to set the parameters within which it operates. Here we can begin to see how the working class makes and remakes itself in different regions and localities in the face of economic restructuring, precisely because its members are forced to adjust to the changing imperatives of capital. It is possible to identify material reasons for differences between places which might also find a reflection in local political structures, and in the case studies in Ch.5 of her book, which start from the changing industrial bases of South Wales and Cornwall,

Massey brings some of these out. In South Wales traditional (male) working class trade union and political cultures are increasingly under challenge because of changes in the local employment structure, while in Cornwall the development of similar employment is being (unsuccessfully) resisted by local businesses eager to avoid competition for labour.

Massey moves from changes in the geography of production to changes in social structure and local politics, but the underlying principle of her approach need not be restricted to the level of production, since it is essentially a historical focus which matters. She concentrates on rounds of investment, in which succeeding rounds in each area build on and are influenced by the results of previous ones - including political legacies, social legacies, and legacies in the form of fixed capital and existing or potential workforces - "the structure of local economies can be seen as a product of the combination of 'layers', of the successive imposition over the years of new rounds of investment, new rounds of activity" (pp.117-118) . A similar notion could presumably exist independently of new rounds of investment, solely at the political level - so that, for example, centrally determined political reforms would have to relate to existing local political cultures, even if the existing social and economic

structures remained unchanged. In practice, the different levels of economic, social and political change might be expected to interact and interrelate, without the same one necessarily always preceding and determining the other, even if one shares Massey's view of the central importance of production in shaping the available options (similar points are made by Halford 1989, p. 161, who is particularly concerned with the development of gender relations at local level and their interaction with local politics and the local state).

Massey herself does not significantly develop this (not surprisingly since she is concerned principally with regional economic geography) but she does explicitly acknowledge some of the possibilities: "Broader social structures of community, changing patterns of consumption..., changing national ideological and political climate and the marked patterns of geographical cultural differentiation - all of these will combine with changes in the social relations of production in determining both the overall pattern of class structure and the more detailed internal characteristics of classes" (Massey 1984, p. 195). Clarke usefully shows the implications of such an extension linking place, culture and class by indicating the ways in which local identities may help to condense "a

whole range of economic, social and political references into a *place*" and going on to identify ways in which 'new' cultures may be overlaid "on the geographical pattern of old working class cultures" (Clarke 1984, pp. 56 and 64). In the 1980s he suggests more positively that, "The geographical attachments of class cultures have been fractured, and new cultures of class may emerge, attempting to solidify a new sense of place on the shifting sands of British society" (Clarke 1984, p. 66).

In principle the arguments we have considered in this chapter suggest that it is important to consider the significance of locally based processes for the development of local politics. One of the weaknesses of dominant modes of political analysis is that they are unable to take such processes into account. The frameworks within which they operate implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) exclude the possibility that differences between places matter much. It is, perhaps, not too difficult to conclude that this is unfortunate and that the bias against the local needs to be countered. But it is less easy to show how this may be done. The next chapter draws on recent arguments developed within and around the discipline of geography as a first step towards showing what is possible, not only confirming that locality matters, but highlighting some of the ways in

which it does.

Chapter 3. How locality matters

3.1 Exploring localities

According to Massey, "particular places are imbedded in wider social structures, are part of broader spatial divisions of labour - a fact that they share with other places - and...each locality brings to that situation its own specific history and its own character...the challenge is to hold on to both the general movement and the particularity of circumstance" (Massey 1984, p. 8). But achieving this is more difficult than accepting its necessity¹. The notion of 'locality' has been the centre of (not always very helpful) debate within geography through the 1980s. It has been used as a way of bringing together different levels of analysis, both seeking to make broad claims about global restructuring (whether informed by marxist political economy or theories of post-modernism), and attempting to explore the practical and detailed consequences of these in particular places, for identifiable social groups.

Positions in the debate have not always been clear cut, since its boundaries have shifted over time, with substantial agreement at the beginning of the decade on the need to stress the importance of spatial

beginning of the decade on the need to stress the importance of spatial variation only leading to more clear cut disagreements at the end. Authors who have worked together at one time, have in other circumstances developed criticisms without always indicating how these relate to the results of earlier collaborative research. Nevertheless, at the risk of over-simplification, it is possible to divide contributions along lines which give more or less importance to structural forces and allow more or less autonomy at local level.

The main lines of argument are already hinted at in criticisms of Massey's position developed by Warde in 1985. Although he promises to criticise what he describes as the 'geological' metaphor adopted by Massey, in practice he does not confront it directly, concentrating instead on the argument that local identities are not "reducible to class structure" and that, "Cumulative local, cultural effects cannot be ignored" (Warde 1985, p. 201). Like Urry, he maintains that spatial divisions of consumption and the spatial structuring of civil society need to be given explicit recognition (Urry 1981 and 1985b, pp. 29-34). In principle, perhaps such criticisms do not seem significant, since Massey, too, as we have seen, would accept the importance of culture. But underlying them seems to be a more significant difference in emphasis. Massey starts with uneven development as a

feature of the capitalist organisation of production, and the identification of localities as a consequence: whilst for Warde the existence of the local is the starting point (uneven development is taken for granted as a 'social fact' rather than a process) and the theorisation of uneven development does not seem particularly important. Although it is not always clear, there remains a theoretical difference between those (including Massey, Duncan, Goodwin, Halford and Savage) for whom the analysis of localities (or the local consequences of spatial variation) is part of a wider commitment to understanding the political economy of modern capitalism and those (including Cooke, Dickens, Urry and Warde) for whom it provides the possibility of identifying political processes which are no longer (or only loosely) related to the pressures of capitalist development².

The main thrust of Warde's criticism of Massey is one which runs through much of the debate surrounding the notion of locality. He interprets Massey's arguments as suggesting that the most important effects of spatial divisions of labour are 'class effects', and argues, on the contrary, that most local effects are 'non-class'. In part this disagreement may reflect a different understanding of class: for Massey, classes are not merely outcomes of production relationships, since they also define themselves in other ways in particular places - for example,

through political and cultural interaction - whilst for Warde and Urry (following Urry's theoretical distinction between production and civil society) they seem restricted to the field of production with all other processes, by definition, being non-class ones. Warde draws on Urry's arguments to highlight the importance of "popular struggles" over consumption at local level (within civil society and not necessarily merely expressed through the local state). He concludes that "by stressing the combined importance of local differences in labour markets, household forms and industrial structure, distinctive spatial aspects of struggle are drawn into focus" (Warde 1985, p. 209. See also Urry 1985a).

Urry takes matters further by beginning to suggest that local variation itself offers a new basis for political activity (particularly around the cleavage between people and state) (Lash and Urry 1987, p. 311). Lash and Urry identify a process of disorganisation within capitalist economies since the 1960s which, they argue, implies a break between paid employment, a decline of national bargaining between major interest groups and a growth in the importance of local politics, based on issues outside paid employment and often organised around 'new' social movements, including the peace movement, the women's movement and the green movement (Lash and Urry 1987, pp. 223-4). They argue that there has

been a growth of non-class collective action, which is increasingly fragmented even at local level (Lash and Urry 1987, p. 311). The evidence they provide for these shifts, however, remains limited.

More important, perhaps, because they start with such tight conditions (nevertheless described as 'minimal') for the development of class based politics at local level, it is unlikely that it would ever have been possible for a class based analysis to be successful (even in the high days of modernity). The conditions they impose include: a closeness at work and home which makes it easy for workers to "minimize the costs of engaging in collective action"; that local 'civil societies' effectively mirror national class divisions; that few social groupings are 'non-class specific' at local level; that gains and benefits are thought only to be available through class-based activity; and a belief that such actions can be successful (even if they are not always successful) (Lash and Urry 1987, p. 93). If these are presented as absolute requirements - as they seem to be by Lash and Urry - then their conclusions about the dominance of non-class relations are hardly surprising, but, equally, nor are they of much theoretical significance, since class is simply defined out of existence. Similarly, the definition of class politics favoured by Urry seems to assume that they must be anti-capitalist, so that if local

struggles are not "generally intended to abolish capitalist relations" but more often to encourage the capitalisation and hence the reproduction of particular localities, then they cannot (by definition) be the product of class politics (Urry 1985b, p. 26). But imposing such a condition for the discovery of class politics at local level seems a little unfair since most analysts would confirm that working class politics are more likely to be reformist than revolutionary (the reasons for this have, of course, been a matter for much debate within marxism from Lenin onwards) and frequently with the same aims in national politics as those which Urry identifies as non-class in the local context (see, e.g., Byrne 1982 on radical reformism at local level and Savage 1987 on the development of working class politics in Preston). Again class politics is simply defined away.

Underlying this argument, however, is the view that local experiences are now more important in developing political and cultural identities. The term 'locale' is used by Giddens in a similar fashion and his discussion of the concept is particularly useful in clarifying some of the ways in which locality might be used in the analysis of political processes. He stresses the ways in which social systems are situated and develop across time and space. They cannot merely be considered as abstract phenomena, but are

the products of interaction between people, groups and institutions in places over time. The contexts within which this interaction takes place are called 'locales' - particular places at specific times - and the interaction is influenced by legacies (even memories) from the past which have helped to produce the place, as well as the pressures of the present. A 'locale' has no permanent or narrow boundaries: it is defined by the processes which take place within it, rather than any institutional framework. This means that Giddens is able to accept the inclusion of regions such as the North of England within his definition, because of its "long-established distinctive social traits" (Giddens 1984, p.122)³ as well as much more limited areas, below the local government level.

The notion of 'locale' has fundamental weaknesses, not least a certain vagueness about its spatial reach which makes it difficult to define and delimit particular 'locales' with any clarity. Any site of social interaction may qualify as a 'locale'. But for our purposes, what matters is acknowledging the existence of interaction at local level which influences the behaviour and self perception of individuals and groups. These analyses do not imply a more or less unchanging local political culture which influences those who experience it. On the contrary, they assume a constant interaction between social classes, groups, political parties,

individuals, national and local government, local and global economic processes which shapes and reshapes the nature of the locale. It confirms the importance of identifying and exploring the processes of interaction which generate different political patterns and practices in different places.

Dickens develops a similar argument, suggesting that one of the reasons for political variation is that people vote "for local and national government strategies which they see as being most appropriate to deal with the particular combination of circumstances in their areas" (Dickens 1988, p. 161), for example, in ways which may influence house prices, employment opportunities and income levels⁴. Dickens contrasts the example of a 'homeowners' in the South-East whose support for the Conservatives may reflect the view that market strategies will continue to encourage a rise in the value of their property, with that of 'homeowners' in the Midlands who may conclude that the value of their property requires extensive state intervention to encourage regional economic revival. The statistical 'home-owner' in one place will, in effect, have different interests in another. Whilst rejecting the stronger formulations of Urry's position which imply too sharp a choice between class and non-class based structures in civil society (Dickens 1988, pp.

103-4), Dickens nevertheless believes that a focus on locality helps to show how "individuals form their own political positions" in ways which cut across class divisions (Dickens 1988, p. 140). Like Urry, he argues that new social movements organised at local level around issues of race and gender (and cutting across lines of class) are becoming more important and more difficult to incorporate into national party politics (Dickens 1988, pp. 168-174).

Castells' approach to urban social movements in 'The City and the Grassroots' is based on a similar interpretation, although in his formulation the urban (or city) replaces the local. He denies that class relationships are the main sources of social change in the city, identifying alternative sources as the "autonomous role of the state, gender relationships, ethnic and national movements, and movements that specifically define themselves as citizen movements" (Castells 1983, p. xviii). He explicitly contrasts his 'new' approach - giving legitimacy to the personal experience of actors - with those which start from "an economically determined structural logic", and argues that "only by analysing the relationship between people and urbanization will one be able to understand cities and citizens at the same time... Every day in every context, people acting individually or collectively, produce or reproduce

the rules of their society, and translate them into their spatial expression and their institutional management" (Castells 1983, p. xvi). For Castells, urban politics becomes the politics of use value, rather than exchange value (or production), and an arena for defensive organisation and he argues that, "when people find themselves unable to control the world, they simply shrink the world to the size of their community" (Castells, 1983 p. 331). Thus Castells acknowledges the weakness of urban movements to deal adequately with the political challenges of an increasingly global political and economic order, but he also claims that they are more than merely defensive, because they "are the organizational forms, the live schools, where the new social movements are taking place, learning to breath, out of reach of the state apparatuses, and outside the closed doors of repressed family life...[they] produce new historical meaning - in the twilight zone of pretending to build within the walls of a local community a new society they know to be unattainable... by nurturing the embryos of tomorrow's social movements within the local Utopias that urban movements have constructed in order never to surrender to barbarism" (Castells 1983, p. 331).

Cooke, too, seeks to identify and explore social processes which "have their source in the local sphere, most notably local or urban social

movements" (Cooke 1989d, p. 268). He sees locality as "one of the bases... around which people may mobilise" (Cooke 1989d, p. 269), in particular identifying "citizenship" as "the mechanism that enables locality to be the organizational base for some kinds of social agency" and stressing the importance of 'proactivity' at local level "as the activation of citizen rights" (Cooke 1989d, p. 271). He acknowledges that mobilization around class, ethnic and gender lines is also important, but suggests that it is nevertheless possible to identify other forms of politics based on locality and citizenship but oriented to the national level. He increasingly defines proactivity in terms of the development of local economic policies, relating to the nation, but allowing scope for mobilization at local level. He suggests that the "existence of a local political culture which involves close political and administrative interaction with industry, and policy-making that is disposed to meet industry's needs, may under appropriate circumstances, cause restructuring to happen with more positive effect in A than B" (Cooke 1987a, p. 74).

Cooke criticises Giddens' notion of locale for being too passive, merely identifying a site for interaction. He goes further to argue that a locality may also provide a basis on which to develop innovations. Cooke also criticises those who see spatial differences to be a product of

interaction between 'supra-local' structures, arguing that some of the differences between places are the result of deliberate specialisation at local level (Cooke 1989c, pp. 10-11). He wants to explore the ways in which some geographical areas become "'spaces for themselves' as well as 'spaces in themselves'" (Cooke 1987b, p. 412), arguing that, "Locality is the space within which the larger part of most citizens' daily working and consuming lives is lived. It is the base for a large measure of individual and social mobilization to activate, extend or defend those rights, not simply in the political sphere, but more generally in the areas of cultural, economic and social life. Locality is thus a base from which subjects can exercise their capacity for pro-activity by making effective individual and collective interventions within and beyond that base" (Cooke 1989c, p. 12. See also Cooke 1990). Although acknowledging that 'proactivity' may also find expression in other ways (e.g. developments in social care) in practice Cooke and the CURS project as a whole tend to focus on local economic policies as a surrogate measure of its existence (see Cooke 1989b, particularly Cooke 1989a, and Harloe et al 1990).

These approaches seek to explain the role of local processes in terms which start with the local (or urban) level. They move beyond the straightforward 'geological' metaphor outlined earlier, because they

emphasise the importance of local responses (as well as capitalist enterprises) in shaping what is possible. They are useful because they highlight the possibility of more or less direct social interaction between people, within and across classes, effectively answering the scepticism of Dunleavy who argues that, "We cannot simply assume that political alignment brushes off on people by rubbing shoulders in the street" (Dunleavy 1979, p. 413). The mechanisms and assumptions are rather more sophisticated than that, helping to explain how individuals and groups define themselves in terms of class, gender and race. It is here that, as Johnston puts it, "people learn their politics - at home and beyond" (Johnston, 1986, p. 594). They learn "the political meanings of their class positions" (Johnston, Pattie and Allsopp 1988, p.269), and it is in this context that classes and other groups form themselves through their own activity, rather than the abstract categories of the statistician (or social theorist).

According to Johnston et al this is reflected in the results of the 1987 general election which, they suggest, confirm the existence of locality or 'neighbourhood' effects. They note a significant reinforcement of support for the locally dominant political party at constituency and regional levels which they argue cannot be explained in any other terms.

And at this level, too, occupational class does seem to play a major part in helping to determine political support, which is not apparent in the same way in national statistics. They conclude that people in all class categories were more likely to identify with the party closest to the 'dominant local ideology' in their area, which in turn was said to be a function of an area's occupational class composition, so that in those which had high concentrations of manual workers and the unemployed it would tend to be favour Labour. Where the one closest to Labour was dominant, a higher proportion of all classes was more likely to be sympathetic to Labour (although not necessarily Labour voters) than in an area where the 'dominant local ideology' was closest to that of the Conservatives. So even among occupational classes whose members would normally be expected to support the Conservatives, a higher proportion would be sympathetic to Labour in the former areas. In the 1987 election, some areas - such as the coalfields - supported Labour to an even greater extent than might have been expected, while others did so to a lesser extent (Johnston, Pattie and Allsopp 1988, p.269).

But it is not just voting patterns or understandings of class which are shaped and shape themselves at local level. Gilroy, for example, stresses the extent to which "Local factors, reflecting the class, ethnic and 'racial'

composition of any particular area, its political traditions, the local economy and residential structure may all play a part in shaping precisely what it means to be black" (Gilroy 1987, p. 231). And he goes beyond any workplace or labour market based definitions to emphasise the cultural aspects of these definitions (see also Solomos 1987, pp. 148-9). Despite the sharpness of her critique of the CURS projects, Rose, too, points to the significance of local political formation based around home and community more than workplace (Rose 1989). And Mark-Lawson et al are able to show how differences between the nature and extent of women's organisation in apparently similar places in the North-West of England may have significantly altered the extent to which welfare initiatives were developed in the inter War period (Mark-Lawson et al 1985). Definitions of gender, 'race' and class cannot simply be deduced from structural divisions, since they included the consequences of self-activity at local level (see also Bagguley et al 1990).

But there is also a danger of moving away from those aspects of Massey's arguments which emphasise a material basis to uneven development within capitalist economies, and seek to link the dynamics of global and local economic, social and political change. Certainly Cooke, Dickens, Urry and Warde might acknowledge the significance of this (they

often start by making reference to Massey's work), but the research focus of each is oriented towards the (local) results of uneven development, rather than seeing it as a continuing process shaping and reshaping what is possible.

A number of further problems also arise with their formulations . The first relates to the definition of locality. This has been a matter of extended debate among those using the term, particularly in identifying areas for research. In practice the definition increasingly used has been that of local labour markets (see, e.g., Cooke 1989d, and Warde 1989 for justifications). Since great emphasis is placed within locality research on non-class (non-employment related) divisions starting with an employment based definition looks slightly peculiar. And, of course, as Duncan and Savage 1990 point out, identifying a labour market area is itself not a straightforward task. But, in a sense, these definitional discussions and the search for precise boundaries is less important than acknowledging the principle that there may be what Massey calls "place-specific" effects as the result of overlap and interaction between activity spaces. How these spaces are defined empirically is a secondary issue, and simple rules of thumb (such as the use of labour market areas) may be helpful starting points, as long as they are not used as determining

exclusive frameworks for interaction. In practice, in much of the writing associated with the CURS project boundaries have been looser, and, sometimes (e.g. in discussions of local politics), they have come closer to those of local authorities (see, e.g., Harloe et al 1990).

A more important set of criticisms around these arguments focuses on the extent to which they encourage a degree of spatial determinism, for example by constructing 'localities' as coherent and more or less consistent political actors in their own right. Cooke's writing about localities sometimes comes dangerously close to an almost evangelical anthropomorphism. "Localities are not simply places or even communities: they are the sum of social energy and agency resulting from the clustering of diverse interests individuals, groups and social interests in space. They are not passive or residual but, in varying ways and degrees, centres of collective consciousness" (Cooke 1989a, p. 296). It is the locality which becomes proactive and in the end the local authority can all too easily be constructed as a straightforward expression of a 'locality' and its interests. So, in practice Urry suggests that, "the interests of 'locality' are best represented by democratically elected local authorities" (Urry, 1990a, p. 188). Despite the theoretical sophistication underlying the construction of 'locality', therefore, the conclusion comes very close to those of the

most unsophisticated statements of local government orthodoxy from the 1960s, with their unproblematic view of local government as an expression of local democracy (see, e.g., Hill, 1970). In practice, too, it must be acknowledged that at least some of the writing with a 'localities' label has often resulted in the publication of research material which catalogues the unique without always succeeding in relating it to wider processes of change, or, indeed, to outcomes of local social and political relations. Much of this material is rich and even fascinating in its own right, but nevertheless seems trapped by its own methodological starting point (see, e.g., Bassett et al 1989 and Bassett and Harloe 1990 on politics in Swindon, Cowen et al 1989 and Cowen 1990 on politics in Cheltenham, and Urry 1990b on politics in Lancaster, all of which outline their particular cases with skill and attention to detail, but seem to find it difficult to move beyond the limits of the local areas on which they focus)⁵.

3.2 The rejection of locality

Some have criticised the new interest in locality rather more harshly, suggesting that it represents a retreat from marxism, in response to the

political pressures of the 1980s - and, in particular, the rise of the new right. Harvey has argued this most strongly, linking a critique of 'realist' philosophy, which he describes as "a convenient cover for or ... a transitional argument back to straight old fashioned and casual empiricism" (Harvey 1987, p. 368), with an attack on locality research. It is, he says, "surely irresponsible and counter revolutionary to turn our backs on the 'luminous summits' of Marxian theory and content ourselves with mere empiricism directed at purely parochial targets of enquiry" (Harvey 1987, p. 376) and he argues instead for a continued focus on "dialectical interaction within the 'totality' of capitalism" (Harvey 1987, p. 368). Smith's earlier critique of the ESRC's Changing Urban and Regional System research programme follows a similar line. He criticises those who wish to emphasise the contingent and the unique, arguing instead that, "The essence of the intellectual enterprise we are engaged in is to construct sustainable generalizations and to judge when these generalizations are no longer sustainable" (Smith 1987, p. 67).

Harvey identifies his own favoured method with that of Marx in 'Capital', in seeking to lay bare the economic laws of motion of modern society. In particular, he refers to the way in which Marx uses abstraction, starting from detailed study, identifying internal relationships, to develop

abstractions which may then look as if they were pre-determined constructs, but in fact arise from the study. Harvey uses Marx's chapter on 'The Working Day' (Marx 1965, Ch. 10) as an example of this process. Marx's method, he says elsewhere, follows a "path of *descent* from the complexity of everyday life to a simple set of concrete representations [or abstractions] of the way everyday life is reproduced" (Harvey 1989c, p. 9). He argues that, "Once the basic abstractions are set up, it is possible to explore them dialectically and so derive other kinds of necessities, other forms of constraint to human freedom, other tensions and contradictions that can become sources of uncertainty in social life" (Harvey 1987, p. 372).

Harvey's restatement and defence of the Marxian position, both here and elsewhere (e.g. Harvey 1982 and 1989c, pp. 8-11), are powerful ones. And one aim of research and intellectual endeavour must indeed be to understand and explore these broad categories⁶. But that cannot be the end of the matter, particularly for marxists, for whom, at least according to Marx, changing the world is at least as important as interpreting it. One of the dangers of generalisation and abstraction at the level which Harvey defines as the sole justified theoretical and empirical project is that it leads to political conclusions which are almost completely disabling ,

suggesting that a global political response is required, but noting that, "The problems of how to forge a more global politics to confront global problems are formidable indeed" (Harvey 1987, p. 376), or, apparently more positively, that, "The problem is to discover a centralized politics that matches the increasingly centralized power of flexible accumulation while remaining faithful to the grass-roots of local resistances" (Harvey 1989c, p. 276). Similarly, Swyngedouw criticises the 'self defeating' attempt by some U.K. local authorities in the 1980s to develop radical initiatives at local level because they failed to understand the increased international power of capital, and instead calls for "the formation of cross territorial and interregional alliances" without providing any assessment of the failure to construct these in the past, or offering any guidelines about how they might be constructed in the future (Swyngedouw 1989, p. 41).

Harvey is eager to explain the 'retreat' into empiricism in terms which stress its material and political basis: it is perhaps unfortunate that he does not turn a similar spotlight on his own position. One explanation for the retreat of marxism into the universities and the great theoretical projects of the 1970s is precisely that it, too, was in retreat from the high point of the late 1960s, which left a number of marxist academics high and dry within institutions and increasingly divorced from

working class politics. Their writing, too, made less and less connection with such politics - what Beauregard describes as "the inward turn of radical practice to radical theorizing" (Beauregard 1988, p. 53) - and was suitably insulated behind the walls of theoretical rigour (or, some would argue, obscurantism)⁷. Harvey explicitly contrasts (and dismisses) the actual expression of working class (and other oppositional) politics and movements with the 'success' of his own theoretical project: "While the recent period has been rather dismal with respect to political action (with working class movements everywhere on the defensive and in any case confused over issues occupation, gender, race, ethnicity and localism), I think it has been salutary from the standpoint of theory building, precisely because we have been forced to evaluate and reformulate our ways of thinking in the light of two decades of experience" (Harvey 1989b, p. 16). The basis of Anderson's critique of an earlier phase in the development of Western marxism is that it reflected and institutionalised a division between theory (and theorising) and working class practice (in large part because of the absence of a mass revolutionary movement). "Marxist theory...acquires its proper contours only in direct relation to a mass revolutionary movement. When the latter is effectively absent or defeated, the former is inevitably deformed or eclipsed" (Anderson 1976, p. 110). He

hoped that the experience of '1968' might make it possible to overcome that division, but the experience since then has, if anything, reinforced it, with 'marxism' becoming an accepted (if increasingly marginalised) part of academic discourse, without sinking roots into working class politics.

Anderson's own conclusions are problematic. Because they assume the requirement of a revolutionary movement before an adequate theory can be developed, it is unclear what should be done while we are waiting: too close involvement with a reformist working class movement will deliver inadequate theory, but so - in this model - will theorising divorced from the working class. This echoes some of the arguments made within the 'locality debate'. On the one hand some - notably Harvey - suggest that it is important to concentrate on the development of uncontaminated theory, whilst the arguments of others (such as Massey) suggest that the risk of 'contamination' is justified if theorisation is to make any connection with political practice (and the experience of daily life). Massey not only argues that the political origins of the CURS project cannot be seen as reactionary but also points to ways in which local initiatives may help provide a basis on which to build more universal campaigns, building on oppositional traditions at local level (Massey 1991b, pp.267-270 and 278-9). Beauregard, too, makes an impassioned plea for the linking of

theory and practice in locality research, suggesting that by emphasising a necessary division between those who espouse theory and those mired in empiricism, there is a danger of making it impossible for one to inform the other. He stresses that practice demands commitment, but also that "commitment neither requires the suspension of critical spirit nor the neglect of theory" (Beauregard 1988, 58)⁸.

Harvey's dismissal of his academic opponents as potential counter revolutionaries may itself be a reflection of his distance from either the analysis or practice of politics. Not only does it draw sharp dividing lines across which debate becomes difficult, but, more important perhaps, it suggests a rather idiosyncratic view of world politics and a careless use of terms: unless Harvey can point to a successful revolution (the USSR? Cuba?) which is currently under attack from the writers on locality, then it is not clear how anyone can be labelled counter revolutionary. Harvey's interpretation of the new direction taken at the start of the 1980s is, in any case, too narrow. It fails to grasp the ambiguity of the moves towards the identification of local experience as an important element in political and economic formation. They did not just take place in the context of retreat, but, at first at least, in the context of defence and even attack as the part of an attempt to construct a new radical alternative of more than

being used as a foundation on which to resist the new right and - equally important - to build alternatives to the negative experience of Labour in power at national level, and not merely as sites where accommodation was being sought. They were often even seen as providing a possible basis for more 'global' political initiatives (see Chapter 6).

Harvey himself has (elsewhere) acknowledged the attempt to develop radical initiatives at local level, although he is sceptical about their potential for success (Harvey 1989b, pp.4-5). It is possible that the logic of the position into which the local left was forced meant that they were simply rationalizing defeat (although a different case will be argued in Ch. 6) but that was certainly not how it was understood by them at the time, nor, indeed, how it was understood by government politicians or the popular press, whose attacks suggest a greater degree of uncertainty. It is more difficult to assess the motives of all those who sought to develop locality research but some at least saw it as a way of linking global and local concerns with theoretically informed research, perhaps identifying possibilities of political radicalization. Certainly, as Beauregard notes, locality research may turn out to be a conservative project, but there is nothing inherent within it which determines that it must be (Beauregard 1988, p. 54). As with the attempts to develop radical politics at local (as

1988, p. 54). As with the attempts to develop radical politics at local (as well, incidentally, as national and international) levels that depends not only on the the existing balance of economic, political and social forces, but also on the strategies adopted by those seeking to influence or analyse those forces.

Insofar as Harvey's emphasis on theory reminds us of the need to ensure that there is clarity about the framework within which any locally based research takes place, it strikes a valuable cautionary note. But, insofar as he dismisses the possibility of any such research, his conclusions are less helpful, and leave little scope for political intervention (or analysis). His method is capable of dismissing any political action but the successful revolution as somehow necessarily mistaken or doomed to failure (see Byrne 1982, p. 73, for a discussion of other forms of working-class politics, including "radical reformism", able to achieve partial victories, short of revolution, and themselves to contribute to the generation of capitalist crises). Harvey briefly refers to Marx's '18th Brumaire' as an example of one of the ways in which Marx allowed people into his theories (Harvey 1987, p 371) but he seems reluctant to follow the same route. This is precisely what the best of locally based research can achieve - in a sense the 'Eighteenth Brumaire'

making it possible to identify key economic, political and social forces interacting to produce particular political possibilities: and each such possibility is particular or unique. It is not general - not even a concrete abstraction. And it must remain a justifiable task for marxists to assess dynamics and possibilities in certain places at particular times.

Harvey's own analysis of the Paris Commune develops an understanding of class relations and political debates within Paris, while placing them in the context of wider economic and political developments, although he might prefer to stress the extent to which it confirmed, developed or illustrated 'theory' or derived necessities (Harvey 1985b, Ch. 3, and 1989 Ch 6). And some of the theoretical insights he has developed, for example around notions of "structured coherence" (see Section 4.1) and "urban entrepreneurialism" (see Section 4.2), paradoxically perhaps, make it possible to develop a clearer understanding both of the ways in which notions of 'locality' may be given a more consistent theoretical basis and how notions of local 'proactivity' may be problematized and reinterpreted politically. The harsh division between 'theory' and 'empiricism' which Harvey appears to support is not only difficult to sustain, but potentially disabling for those trying to develop both an understanding of the operation of capitalism and the experience of politics.

of capitalism and the experience of politics.

3.3 Localities, uneven development and spatial variation

Harvey's solution to the problem of 'uneven development', linking the laws of motion of capitalism to the existence of differentiated places, is to concentrate attention on the former, whilst acknowledging the significance of the latter as the equivalents of laboratories, within which the implications of those laws can be explored more fully, and the laws themselves can be specified more precisely. Others - including Massey - have understood the task rather differently, seeking to use the notion of uneven development (or combined and uneven development, Morgan and Sayer 1988, pp. 19-20) to highlight the significance of interaction between levels and to allow a concern with localities a degree of academic (and political) legitimacy⁹. If much of the writing explicitly concerned with 'locality' (e.g., associated with the CURS project, Cooke, Urry and Warde) tends in practice to focus on the local side of uneven development, and Harvey concentrates on the 'global' side, then these authors seek more deliberately to integrate both elements in theorising and research. As Massey stresses: "localities are not internally introspective bounded

unities. They have to be constructed through sets of social relations which bind them inextricably to wider arenas, and other places" (Massey 1991, p. 279). But attempting this task does not mean either that it is easy to achieve, or that these authors have yet been successful. On the contrary, although it is easy to state the broad ambitions, it is much more difficult to achieve them.

Both the value of the attempt and the difficulties which surround it can best be illustrated in work associated with a group of researchers based at or associated with Sussex University, and particularly Duncan, Goodwin, Halford and Savage, but also often working with others¹⁰. These researchers have over the past decade been concerned to explore and identify what it means to talk of localities, and local social processes, whilst retaining a broader notion of capitalist development. They have not sought to present a unified and monolithic interpretation across this period, but in the process of research have changed, qualified and developed their positions. Their openness to theoretical debates, their stress on theoretically informed research and their readiness to respond to the results of empirical research makes their work particularly useful in understanding the implications of spatial differentiation for political development at local level.

In early formulations of the arguments, these authors started by stressing the "importance of local variations", something often missed in more orthodox studies of society and politics. Local was defined as 'sub-national'. A focus on the national level, they stressed, might miss "specifically local mechanisms, local social processes, which help produce social changes in particular places" (Dickens et al 1985, p. 17). They used the term locality to mean "a socially defined unit, distinguished by active and specific differences in causal processes" (Dickens et al 1985, p. 18). In this particular formulation of the arguments, there were few disagreements with others using the same term (such as Urry, see Dickens et al 1985, p. 21). Stress, however, was already placed on the uneven development of social relations (rather than space in its own right), and the orientation of research was said to be towards a study of the ways in which the "uneven development of social processes... mediates processes generated in wider structural systems" (Dickens et al, p. 23).

Duncan and Goodwin (1988, Ch 2) explicitly relate notions of uneven development to debates about local government and the local state. Unlike others using the term, for them it is important that the local state is local. "The uneven development of societies," they argue, "also means that class structures and other social relations are constituted spatially,

sometimes in rather specific ways" (Duncan and Goodwin 1988, p. 73). And precisely because systems "are spatially constituted and differentiated, it is necessary for state systems to respond with the development of local states" (Duncan and Goodwin 1988, p. 69). They go beyond this to indicate ways in which local social processes may influence the local state, pointing out that "social relations including class relations are just that - relations between people and formed socially" (Duncan and Goodwin 1988, p. 41. See also similar formulation in Dickens et al 1985, p. 19). In other words, classes and other social groups form themselves and define themselves through these forms of interaction, as well as in terms of their 'structural positions'. And Duncan and Goodwin make claims to be able to identify 'causal local processes', that is "locally specific relations that are socially generative" (Duncan and Goodwin 1988, p. 58). They emphasise that "social mechanisms are not necessarily universal but can be derived locally" (Duncan and Goodwin 1988, p. 60). It is, they say, because local interests may take control of local states (reflecting local social relations) that conflict between national and local states is inevitable: in the first place, they argue that local states are necessary to reflect spatial divisions, but precisely because those divisions may begin to find expression in political terms then they also begin to challenge the more

universal claims of the state at national level. The contradictory role of the local state as agent of and obstacle to the centre means that conflict is unavoidable (Duncan and Goodwin 1988, Chs 5 and 8).

Duncan and Goodwin build on arguments developed by Harvey in his discussion of regional development to explain differences between local governments, stressing the significance of uneven development. Harvey writes of what he calls a 'structured coherence'. Duncan and Godwin draw on a paper whose main focus is on global regions but suggest that the points Harvey makes are also relevant at local level. Harvey argues that "There are processes at work..that define **regional spaces** within which production and consumption, supply and demand (for commodities and labour power), production and realisation, class struggle and accumulation, culture and life style, hang together as some kind of structured coherence within a totality of productive forces and social relations" (Harvey 1985a, p.146). Harvey himself has also applied the notion of 'structured coherences' to the local - or urban - level, suggesting that they may be generated within "loosely defined" urban regions based around urban labour markets and "defined around a dominant technology of both production and consumption and a dominant set of class relations" (Harvey 1989c, p. 126).

These are very condensed statements, but the underlying argument is

nevertheless helpful. Harvey's analysis starts from an interpretation of the needs of capitalist development, in which regional specialisation is encouraged because it limits the costs of time and transport which are otherwise likely to reduce profitability. Such specialisation helps to construct an identity based around urban regions, and to become self reinforcing, as infrastructure, labour supply, and urban cultures come together to confirm existing forms of specialisation. So within such regions, one begins to get a 'structured coherence' with which people - and sometimes institutions, including enterprises - identify. Regional identification becomes an element in the the formation of classes and other social groups. A regional consciousness is generated.

Harvey's approach also allows a more independent role for the development of consciousness at regional and local (urban) level because once a 'structured coherence' exists, its different elements are able to interact with each other, at least as long as it is not undermined by external forces, or the system itself begins to break down, for example, because different groups define the 'region' differently. Duncan and Goodwin build on this possibility, moving beyond Harvey's formulation of a strictly limited relative autonomy for urban politics, to suggest that the development of regional and local cultures "will be partly formed by social

practices and relations autonomous to the logic of capital" (Duncan and Goodwin 1988, p. 65). Where Harvey stresses the instability of the 'structured coherences' he identifies (because of continuing "competition, accumulation and technical change". Harvey 1989c, p. 126), Duncan and Goodwin suggest that they provide a continuing foundation for spatially based (local) state forms. Indeed, they argue that "state institutions play a major role in people's attempts to organize and control uneven development - to institutionalize structural coherence as a 'spatial fix'" (Duncan et al 1988, p. 110).

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that what is being identified here is a 'locality', defined in terms of 'structural coherence', distinguishable from other 'localities' and with a degree of political and social autonomy. Indeed, it is only on such a basis that Duncan and Goodwin are able to identify necessary contradictions between national and local state (see also Goodwin 1989, pp.157-9). But elsewhere Duncan also raises serious questions about assuming that all places are localities "in the sense of autonomous subnational social units" (Duncan 1989b, p. 247). On the contrary, he argues that localities in this sense are rare and that use of the term tends to be misleading, encouraging what he calls spatial determinism - that is the view that "spatial patterns cause social

behaviour" (Duncan 1989b, p. 221). Despite his distrust of 'locality', however, Duncan continues to stress the importance of spatial variation, noting both the importance of what he calls spatial contingency effects and local causal processes. All social processes are influenced by spatial contingency effects because they develop (are constituted) in particular places and are therefore influenced by their interaction with pre-existing spatially variant economic, social and political forms. But in some cases it is also possible to identify causal processes generated at local level, because "determining social systems are spatially variant, and because actors monitor and respond to their variable contexts" (Duncan 1989b, p. 247).

Duncan's concerns were initially spelled out in a working paper published in 1986 (Duncan 1986), but their full implications do not seem to have been explored until later in the decade - they are not, for example, taken up in Duncan and Goodwin 1988, in which the term locality is used in a relatively unproblematised fashion (but, see also Savage et al 1987). More recently Duncan and Savage have developed the position further, now arguing that locality was little more than a "conceptual gap-filler", utilised as a means of introducing spatial variation and moving away from the "aspatial structuralist work of the 1970s" (Duncan and Savage 1989, p.

205). Now it is no longer needed, they suggest, and instead "we should construct abstractions appropriate to the causal chain under examination, including spatial specifications if and when relevant" (Duncan and Savage 1989, p. 205. See also Duncan and Savage 1991, p. 157).

In addition to stressing the importance of spatial contingency effects as objects for concrete research, they also identify what they call a spatial boundary effect, which seems to be a development of the notion of local causal processes referred to earlier. But now it is seen as a special case of the contingency effect, confirming that social systems have boundaries, which means that "originating, generative mechanisms will not be universally present or equally developed" (Duncan 1989a, p. 139. See also Savage and Duncan 1989, p. 182). They return to the notion of uneven development, arguing that different social processes may "possess - or not possess - different forms of uneven development mechanisms" and call for research to investigate what these might be in different cases (Savage and Duncan 1989, p. 183). Goodwin has begun to explore what these might be in the sphere of civil society (Goodwin 1988) and Halford has developed an assessment of women's initiatives in local government, looking at gender relations as they find expression in the spatial divisions of labour and civil society (Halford 1989. See also Duncan et al 1988).

The arguments of these researchers provide a useful way of taking the 'locality debate' further. Their rejection of the notion of localities as autonomous systems with their own 'interests' beyond those of the social groups which make them up is convincing. So too is their continued stress on the importance of spatial variation in explaining social relations and political behaviour. But scepticism about 'locality' as a proactive agent in its own right does not mean that the importance of the local element of the local state has to be neglected. On the contrary, setting it within the framework of uneven development emphasises that importance, stressing the need to explore the ways in which social processes interact at the local level, but also ensuring that the non-local nature of some of the key processes is not forgotten.

Warde criticises Duncan and Savage for failing to acknowledge the significance of context "as a constraining or empowering condition of action" (Warde 1989, p. 279). Although they reply in terms which reject this charge (Duncan and Savage 1990, p. 71), Warde's formulation is, at least, a useful development of the position: "The point is that a configuration of institutions and forces comes to exist at a determinate point in space and time, and that provides the conditions in which people are obliged to make their own history" (Warde 1989, p. 280). Elsewhere

Warde's use of the term 'local political environment' is helpful in indicating the ways in which 'context' is important in the analysis of local politics, because "It implies a notion of incremental change, of one element affecting another...the environment structures the agenda for all political actors, setting the agenda for interaction between all parties" (Mark-Lawson and Warde 1987, p. 229). Such a modest expression of the 'locality' focus can hardly be charged with the sins identified by Duncan and Savage.

Like Duncan and Goodwin, Cox and Mair also build on Harvey's notion of 'structural coherence' but they do so to argue for a stronger notion of 'locality' than that allowed by Duncan, Savage and others. Cox and Mair suggest that even the distinction between the necessary and the contingent, may be misleading, because it fails to acknowledge the extent to which contingencies may become internalised as "structured internal elements of the encompassing social logic of capitalism" (Harvey and Scott 1989, quoted in Cox and Mair 1989a, p. 126). And, similarly, although Harvey acknowledges that 'space' and 'time' are socially constructed, he also argues that "the social definitions of space and time operate with the full force of objective facts to which all individuals and institutions necessarily respond" (Harvey 1990, p. 418). Lipietz' discussion of relations

between national regimes of accumulation has similar implications. The coherence of the world system, he stresses, "is simply the effect of the interaction between several relatively autonomous processes, of the provisionally stabilized complementarity and antagonism that exists between various national regimes of accumulation" (Lipietz 1987, p.25).

Similarly, he argues that the "state is the institutional form which condenses the compromises which prevent the different groups making up the national (or at least territorial) community from destroying one another in an endless struggle" (Lipietz 1987, p.19)¹¹. The key point then is to acknowledge the importance of interaction and the ways in which 'autonomous' developments come together to produce a 'system' which reproduces itself, but may also be undermined and replaced as a result of new pressures.

Cox and Mair apply a similar argument to the notion of locality, suggesting that "locations that are initially contingent to each other may come to assume a degree of necessity in their relations...We have tried to capture this idea at the local scale through the concept of 'local dependence' of firms, governments and people" (Cox and Mair 1989a, p. 126). They continue by attempting to identify the basis for such dependence: "Socio-spatial structures of immobility, in combination with

geographical delimitations that effectively maintain social relations, are the material bases for the production of actual territories (at various scales). It is through these socio-spatial structures that capitalists obtain profits, landlords gain rents, and workers earn wages. While certain generalized technological and social conditions may obtain, there will be particular socio-spatial structures, located around particular sites, necessary to their maintenance. If socio-spatial structures are limited to a particular scale, such as the local, various economic agents acquire interests that are defined at that scale" (Cox and Mair 1989a, pp 126-7). According to Cox and Mair, this produces localities which are "only semicoherent, but nonetheless recognisable" (Cox and Mair 1991, p. 201).

Those dependent in this way (for example those involved in 'information networks', such as property developers, estate agents and banks, or other local businesses and workers with particular skills) may, according to Cox and Mair, attempt to combine in territorially (possibly locally) based alliances or coalitions, thus even giving the impression that localities are somehow "active in their own right" (Cox and Mair 1989a, p. 129. See also Cox and Mair 1988 and 1989b, and Section 3.6 below). It is in this sense that they remain sympathetic to Cooke's notions of local proactivity (Cox and Mair 1991, p. 198)¹². Cox and Mair see themselves as

identifying abstractions (local dependence, local coalitions) appropriate to the level of localities, so that they are not just focusing on the contingent. And they stress that in their conception locality is "irreducibly political", in the sense that "it is not just produced, it is struggled over" (Cox and Mair 1989a, p. 129).

This interpretation of the notion of 'locality' begins to make it clearer how different places are able to develop their own distinct political arrangements, so that their 'uniqueness' can be acknowledged, whilst still making it possible to relate that 'uniqueness' directly to wider theoretical understandings. It is helpful in identifying some of the potential bases for local politics in different places. By developing a notion of layers of abstraction, Cox and Mair have made it easier to see what levels are likely to be most appropriate in the analysis of the local state. But the specification of locally dependent interests remains underdeveloped. There is a danger that the argument may become circular, so that those who are actually involved in local growth politics simply become defined as locally dependent. The notion of 'immobility' as a defining characteristic is also problematic, since it is likely to vary over time, and degrees of 'immobility' may be influenced as much by political success as by any other factor - some firms, for example, may be 'immobile' because they have the

local state in their pocket instead of being interested in influencing the local state because of their inherent 'immobility'. There is, finally, a danger that by defining the scope for local politics (and, by implication, local autonomy) in this way it is possible to ignore or play down the local impact of non-locally dependent agencies, which in some cases may be more important for the local state.

3.4 The limits of localities

It will already be clear from the preceding argument that picking one's way through the 'locality debate' is like picking one's way through a conceptual minefield. It may, however, by now be unclear quite what remains to be drawn from the debate which is likely to be of value in the analysis of local politics. It may also, therefore, be helpful briefly to summarise the key points which will inform the argument developed in the chapters which follow.

Above all, the points made by Duncan and summarised above, are central to that argument. Following Massey, he stresses the importance of spatial variation arising out of the process of uneven development, even while rejecting the stronger claims which some have made for the notion

of 'locality'. The contexts within which political actors perform are, in Duncan's words, variable and this influences their behaviour. Warde's notion of local political environment or context may be stronger than that favoured by Duncan and his colleagues, but it, too, is a useful expression of the way in which locality might matter. Here the points made by Cox and Mair who stress the ways in which contingent processes may become internalised are particularly helpful, confirming that although shaped and influenced by global processes, the definitions with which people work may themselves, in Harvey's words, operate with the full force of objective facts. Cox and Mair usefully go on to describe the possibility of socio-spatial structures based around notions of local dependency for particular economic interest groups.

There may still be problems with some of these formulations - for example because local dependency is not always easy to specify - but they provide a useful starting point for further consideration. The danger of a too deliberate focus on locality is that it makes it difficult to see some of the ways in which local politics fits into a wider set of political arrangements. Although the importance of global and national economic change is acknowledged in these debates, they seem to find it more difficult to acknowledge the significance of state structures and the

politics generated within and around them. In the next chapter, attention is shifted again to consider some of the ways in which the conclusions drawn from the 'locality debate' may be brought together with some of those developed within the literature of political science.

Notes

1. I have expressed my doubts about the success of Massey's own attempt to do so in Cochrane 1987b.

2. Duncan and Savage draw a similar but not identical distinction between those such as Cooke who see localities as having their own social power and themselves (and Gregson) who argue that "spatial variations should be incorporated into the analysis of social processes as appropriate to any particular research problem" (Duncan and Savage 1991, p. 157). They place Urry and Warde in an intermediate position between themselves and Cooke.

3. It is, perhaps, a reflection of academic life in the particular 'locale' of Cambridge that a sweeping conclusion of this sort can be drawn about such an internally differentiated 'place' as "the North of England". Despite the assumptions of Giddens, it is difficult to see how "the North" qualifies as a locale, except through the prism of stereotypes generated in the

South-East.

4. Miller's analysis of voting in local elections is also of interest here. On the basis of a national survey, he concludes that there is some scope for variation from national party affiliations at local level, although it is limited, and among Conservative and Labour voters, more likely to express itself in shifts to the Alliance (the survey was conducted in 1985) or other parties or in differential abstention than in any direct shift in votes between the major parties. He concludes by agreeing cautiously with Jones and Stewart (1983) about the possibility of variation at local level, around a norm which is the product of national factors (Miller 1986, p. 169). It is, however, perhaps also worth pointing out that Miller's approach takes for granted the primacy of support for parties at national level, making little allowance for the possibility that identification with national parties may also be influenced by local factors in the ways suggested by Johnston et al (1988). He includes education, class and age as 'national' factors, with only length of residence as a 'local' factor, yet many 'national' factors find specific local expressions, and the argument of Massey and others would be that 'classes' themselves are, in part at least, formed at local level. Miller's focus on local elections means he does not have to explain variation in national voting patterns once allowance is made for the

factors he identifies as 'national'.

5. Others associated with the CURS project prove able to move beyond these limits, for example, in the cases of Beynon et al (1989) and Hudson (1990) exploring forms of political accommodation at local level in the context of economic decline, in the case of Meegan (1989 and 1990) highlighting local (community, rather than 'locality') responses to economic decline and restructuring, and in the cases of Buck et al (1989) and Pickvance (1990) analysing tensions within forms of municipal conservatism. It is unclear whether the reasons for these differences within the broader project simply reflect the possibilities bequeathed by the areas (or localities) on which the research focused, or the different theoretical starting points of the researchers, which are also apparent.

6. Graham's critique of what she calls 'essentialist' marxism and her call for the development of a 'non-essentialist' marxism includes criticism of Harvey and Massey for their 'reductionism'. Her defence of Althusser may be justified, since she seeks to rescue him from the structuralist label, but her conclusions confirm one of the weaknesses of his approach, at least insofar as it seeks to locate itself within the marxist tradition.

Because Althusser's definition of 'science' leaves it floating free of contamination by society and economics, it can be (and was) used to

justify almost any form of practice (from Stalinism to Eurocommunism).

Similarly, her own conclusions seeking to justify the marxist focus on class and production simply leave it looking like a rather idiosyncratic choice made because it was made. Her 'non-essentialist' marxism, whatever its other advantages, seems to have little linking it to the marxist tradition, except the label (Graham 1988, 1990).

7. Redfern develops similar points rather more harshly, concluding with the rather peculiar exhortation to Harvey that he should "go canvassing for the Labour Party in Oxford at the next election" (Redfern 1987, p. 417).

8. To avoid potential confusion, it is perhaps necessary to point out that this argument does not imply that active politics is only possible at local level - or in localities. On the contrary they could be developed at global, national, regional or local levels: and might, indeed, be expected to attempt to link these apparently separate levels. In this case, however, the argument is both that local politics may be radical and that the arguments which suggest that they cannot be are themselves politically disabling.

9. The notion of combined and uneven development, at least in its earliest formulations, was used by Trotsky to explain the possibility of revolution in 'backward' countries (such as Russia, e.g. in 'Results and Prospects' first published in 1906. Trotsky 1978) by stressing the ways in which such

countries were a mixture of the most advanced and backward sectors of economic and social organisation. As Mandel has argued more recently, those countries which "comprise 'concrete' capitalism, reproduce in varying forms and proportions a combination of past and present modes of production, or more precisely, of varying past and present stages of the present mode of production" (Mandel 1975, p. 23). Two points arise from this which may need to be clarified here. First, the contemporary writers on uneven development would not accept the argument that capitalism moves through a series of necessary stages, which are then 'combined' in different ways in different places. They would argue both that interaction in those places might produce new arrangements going beyond mere combination, and that there is, in any case, not a hierarchy of stages which can be identified from first principles. Great care would be taken to avoid a language which utilised words such as 'backward' or 'advanced' as scientific terms. Secondly, their focus on regional and sub-regional areas makes a significant difference, since the boundaries between places are less clear cut and the interaction between them is more extensive. It also means that no-one would argue that radical political change in one locality could survive - even in distorted or degenerate - form, without influencing wider (national) political. The constraints facing places within countries

are even greater than those facing Third world countries within the international division of labour.

10. The identification of this group with the University of Sussex is convenient rather than exclusive: not all those working in related areas at Sussex should be seen as part of this group (I have, for example, discussed the rather different position of Dickens earlier); nor have all those I have placed in this group always taken such a distinctive position; nor have they always been based at Sussex (Savage was at Lancaster and is now at Keele; Duncan works at the London School of Economics; and Goodwin now works at St. Davids, Lampeter). But many of the key publications discussed in this section have found their first expression in working papers published by the Department of Urban and Regional Studies at the University of Sussex, and a joint statement of their position explicitly refers to a Sussex based programme of research (Savage et al 1987).

11. Jessop makes a related theoretical point in his discussion of 'contingent necessity' in pointing to the ways in which any particular event is "the overdetermined result of the interaction of different causal chains" (Jessop 1990b, p. 12).

12. In practice, however, Cox and Mair develop the argument about 'locality as agent' in ways which seem to move away from Cooke's formulation,

since they are mainly concerned to identify the possibility of cross-class alliances at local level, and generally with the implication that such alliances will tend to be led by local business interests, often with the help of local states themselves requiring to justify their own positions (Cox and Mair 1991, pp. 204-211).

Chapter 4. Bringing politics back in: growth coalitions, urban corporatism and policy networks

4.1 Local corporatism and growth coalitions

Much of the writing about local politics has tended to take existing structures of government and definitions of politics for granted, but with a more explicitly local focus. In itself this has been valuable. The stress on the role of parties in constructing local political alliances highlights the existence of an active political sphere at local level (see, e.g., Duncan and Goodwin 1988, Savage 1989, Bassett et al 1989, and Buck et al 1989). But it is increasingly the case that other forms of political accommodation are also apparent at that level, for example reflected in Bagguley et al 1989, and Beynon et al 1989, particularly the latter with its stress on the reconstitution of corporatist arrangements at local level, when the old basis of them has disintegrated (see also Chapter 6, below). In developing their arguments about 'growth coalitions' and localities, Cox and Mair also point towards the possibility of non-electoral forms of political mediation at local level.

In the past writers such as Cawson have been sceptical about the possibility of 'local corporatism' because it implies too great a degree of independence or autonomy for economic actors and the state at local level. Cawson argued that whilst it might be possible to have 'corporatism at local level' through which national interests were represented and incorporated local interests or imposed national priorities at local level, it was more difficult to imagine what a strictly 'local' corporatism would look like, since neither 'capital' nor 'labour' could be seen as local phenomena. In most case, he argues, "the local dimension is the target for intervention rather than the basis for the organisation of the participating bodies" (Cawson 1985a, p.144). There is, however, a danger that such a sharp distinction, based on the definition of corporatism as an ideal type with capital and labour as rather monolithic categories, will actually make it difficult to identify corporatist style structures and relationships at local level. This is something Cawson himself seems to have recognised in his discussion of micro-corporatism, with reference to the Greater London Council and its economic policy (Cawson 1986, pp.118-121, and 1985c, p. 17) and in the developing local economic policies of the late 1980s with their emphasis on public-private partnership, collaboration and the

interchange of ideas it looks still more appropriate. The identification of a growing sector of non-elected local government is only one example of this (Stoker 1988 Ch.3. See also Chapter 6 below).

One of the problems with using 'corporatism' as a theoretical concept, is that, like locality, it has proved remarkably difficult to define with any degree of precision. Not only has it been taken up by writers from different traditions and developed to mean substantially different things, but some have presented corporatism as part of a positive political programme while others have seen it as a less positive aspect of political incorporation associated with modern capitalism (see, e.g., the surveys by Cawson 1985c and 1986). The main features of corporatism, however, have been summarised frequently enough, at least in ideal typical terms. Cawson defines it as "a specific socio-political process in which organizations representing monopolistic functional interests engage in political exchange with state agencies over public policy outputs which involves those organizations in a role that combines interest representation and policy implementation through delegated self-enforcement" (Cawson 1985c, p. 8). As Schmitter notes, of course, in practice all of these features do not always cluster together, so it is never

possible to identify a 'perfect' corporatism, even if it is possible to recognise corporatist features, or tendencies (Schmitter 1989, p. 65). The importance of corporatist formulations is that they direct our attention to the extent to which, in Offe's words, public status is accorded to particular interest groups going beyond the limits of class organizations (Offe 1981). Offe also usefully points out that there may be two processes at work here: in the case of working class organisations corporatisation implies limitation, "restraint, discipline, responsibility" (albeit in return for potentially significant concessions. See also Esping-Andersen 1985), whereas in the case of 'private' or pluralist groups (such as doctors and other welfare state professionals) it may rather imply a "contracting out of state power" (Offe 1981, pp.139-40). Offe concludes by suggesting that there is an asymmetry within corporatist arrangements under capitalism, which place greater limitations on labour than they do on capitalist interests (Offe 1981, pp.146-150). As a result, he is more critical than either Cawson or Schmitter appear to be.

It has increasingly been recognised that formulations which focus solely on national level bargaining between capital, labour and the state (or other 'peak' organisations) may miss the significance of related

arrangements at other levels, whether sectorally or territorially divided (and, indeed, they may also miss supranational arrangements such as those associated with the European Community). The narrowness of such definitions may make it more difficult to assess the significance of changes which have taken place. The use of terms such as meso- and micro-corporatism has been useful in highlighting this, with Cawson defining meso-corporatism as that which involves "political exchange between state agencies and more specialised interest associations" and micro-corporatism as that which involves "direct bargaining between state agencies and firms", although he is also careful to stress that for the latter to be understood as any form of corporatism then the state agencies involved must at least have a degree of independence, so that they are not dependent on (or sponsored by) the groups with which they negotiate (Cawson 1985c, p. 16. See also Bonnet 1985 on micro-corporatism).

Although, in practice, much of the writing on corporatism has focused on direct state-industry relations, such a focus is by no means essential. Cawson himself has analysed the structures of the welfare state with the help of corporatist theory (Cawson 1982) and Reade's analysis of the planning profession discusses town planners, in ways compatible with the

definition cited earlier, as representing a functional interest with special access to power (Reade 1987, pp. 120-131). Rhodes' approach to the analysis of central-local relations, too, may be compatible with notions of meso-corporatism, because of the way in which he stresses that, "the professions become institutionalised in policy networks and their unified view of the world - based on common ideas, values and knowledge - sets the parameters to local decision-making" (Rhodes 1986, p. 241)¹. But, the importance of links between industry and the state at local level have also increasingly been recognised, and analysis has begun to point to ways in which these links may be understood as both local and corporatist (see, e.g., Flynn 1983, Hernes and Selvik 1981, King 1985), although others have been more reluctant to utilise such terms (see, e.g., Brindley et al 1989, Moore and Richardson 1989).

The nature and significance of the local politics of business has been debated more extensively in the US context where Logan and Molotch have developed the notion of an 'urban growth machine' as a useful starting point (Molotch 1976, Logan and Molotch 1987). They have identified a local politics of growth focused on the role of property and development interests, which are said to be primarily concerned with the maximisation

of income from rent and property values. In structural terms, it is argued that these interests are oriented towards the realisation of exchange value from urban areas, whilst residents are primarily concerned with use values. This may result in conflicts (e.g. expressing themselves in the development of anti-growth coalitions), but it is suggested that the power of the 'growth machines' is such that opponents will finally be bought out and the imposition of strict planning policies avoided. Smith takes a similar view of the US experience, stressing the extent to which 'public-private partnerships' have generally been oriented towards restoring or increasing "the property value of urban space" (Smith 1988, p. 43).

This interpretation has, however, been sharply criticised by Cox and Mair for being so narrowly focused on property values, to the extent that Logan and Molotch themselves have to acknowledge the role of other groups through a sleight of hand, so that 'rentiers' seem to lose their initially central place in the theory because others also have an interest in exchange values (Cox and Mair 1989b, pp. 138-9). Instead, Cox and Mair suggest, building on their arguments about locality (Cox and Mair 1989a), that urban growth coalitions will be organised between groups and

organisations which are, in some sense, locally dependent. This implies not only that people and organisations cannot move very easily, but also that they define themselves by (and reproduce themselves in specific ways because of) their particular location (also reflected, for example, in the notion of a 'spatial fix'. Harvey 1989b, Ch. 5). There may be conflicts between different groups at this level (with the possibility of anti-growth coalitions developing over industrial restructuring, or over environmental issues) and it is because of these, according to Cox and Mair, that business coalitions develop. These are made up of local firms which "attempt to ward off opposition to their plans for local economic development by forging a consensus based on the co-optation of their potential opponents, a consensus in which the politics of restructuring is conceived of as a competition among 'localities' rather than as a struggle within them" (Cox and Mair 1988, pp. 307-308).

Harvey takes this further by indicating how competition may move beyond the more obvious aspects of local economic development. He argues that, "The active production of places with special qualities becomes an important stake in spatial competition between localities, cities, regions and nations. Corporatist forms of governance can flourish in such spaces,

and themselves take on entrepreneurial roles in the production of favourable business climates and other special qualities. And it is in this context that we can better situate the striving ...for cities to forge a distinctive image and to create an atmosphere of place and tradition that will act as a lure to both capital and people 'of the right sort'" (Harvey 1989a, p.295). In the US context, Gottdiener concludes that this process means that we are seeing the death of local politics, with the local state losing its autonomy, but perhaps it is more accurate to say that we are seeing its transformation along different lines (Gottdiener 1987). Smith explicitly concludes that the growing numbers of 'public-private partnerships' in the US are "forms of local corporatism" intended to "extract material resources from society and to build symbolic support for the goals of local networks of economic and political elites" (Smith 1988, p. 209)².

Although the notion of an urban growth coalition (particularly as developed by Cox and Mair and modified in the light of Harvey's arguments) may be a useful one it has barely been developed in the UK context (although Pickvance has written about spatial coalitions, mainly at regional level. Pickvance 1985). One recent attempt to do so makes little

direct reference to the U.S. theories, except by implication, suggesting instead that the key 'coalition' in the development of Swindon was between leading politicians and professionals (Bassett and Harloe 1990, p.58). And this suggests a continuing problem for the theory in its more general forms: many of the features of growth coalitions seem to show themselves even where the active participation of a business coalition or property based coalition is more difficult to identify.

In the case of the U.K. it has been necessary to construct business involvement from above (see, e.g., Cochrane 1991). It has not simply been generated as a result of local pressures, from existing business groups. It may, for example, be possible for a local political organisation (such as Swindon's Labour leadership) or professional group (such as Swindon's chief officers) to develop a politics of growth in which - to start with at least - the business interests have to be assumed instead of being an already existing and locally identifiable force. Cooke stresses the extent to which local authorities may lead coalitions based around negotiation and partnership with agents in the private sector and the community (Cooke 1988). And, even in the US context, it is necessary to acknowledge the importance of political entrepreneurs able to bring together widely

different actors and interests around the promise of growth, "by creating new governmental bases for exercising new powers which none of these actors and interests could otherwise have exercised on its own"

(Mollenkopf 1983, p.4.). Cox and Mair also seem to acknowledge this in their discussion of the role of the state, but they are more reluctant to allow the state (or, more accurately, political actors within it) an initiating role (Cox and Mair 1991, pp. 208-210). Mollenkopf stresses the key role of public actors in taking the initiative, to the extent that it may even be possible to reshape the 'contours' of private sector interests.

4.2 Organisational politics and policy networks

An underlying problem with these theories (at least in the UK context) is that they tend to underestimate the significance of more extensive networks of national politics, organisational structures and professional relationships. So, if the possibility of local corporatism and urban growth coalitions is one aspect of local politics which needs to be explored, a second is their position within wider political networks. The model adopted by Duncan and Goodwin, suggests an inexorable struggle between

central and local government under capitalism, which can ultimately only be resolved by victory for the centre - "it is the political objective of removing local government's autonomy that is at issue" (Duncan and Goodwin 1988, p. 188). But, if this is the aim of central government, it is an unrealisable and unlikely one, since - as Duncan and Goodwin also note - central government needs local government as much as local government needs the centre (and, of course, this is one implication of explaining the existence of local government in terms of uneven development) (see also Cochrane 1985). Jessop's discussion of the state as generator of strategies is useful in this context, since it points to some of the ways in which "the role of state managers (both politicians and career officials) is crucial in understanding how a relative unity is imposed on the various (in)activities of the state and how these activities acquire a relative autonomy from the conflicting pressures emanating from civil society" (Jessop 1990b, p. 261).

One way of developing this point in analysing the position of the local state is to understand it as part of a series of networks involving central government, and a range of other public and quasi-public organisations. This is essentially the argument developed and refined by Rhodes (1981, 1985 and 1988). He identifies the post-war growth of sub-central (not

only local) government in the UK with the development of the welfare state. At least until the end of the 1970s, he argues that "financial relationships between central and local governments can also be characterised as a complex set of interactions involving a range of government institutions and placing a premium on networking skills...The intricate pattern of linkages is both a constraint and a source of opportunities for local government" (Rhodes 1981, pp. 28 and 34). More recently, the constraints may have become tighter, and the opportunities less obvious, but the the pattern of relationships has not changed so dramatically. The starting point of Rhodes' argument is that the influence of the centre "lies in its ability to cajole, bully and persuade (but not command), and even this ability may not call forth the desired degree of compliance" (Rhodes 1988, p. 1). And his concern with sub-central governments (in which he includes the decentralised structures of central departments, the nationalised industries and ad hoc bodies or quangos as well as elected local governments) is not an apologetic one. On the contrary, he "rejects a fixation on Westminster and Whitehall", believing that it does not help very much in answering the question: "who gets what public services when and how?" (Rhodes 1988, p. 1). Answering that

question adequately, he suggests, requires an analysis of sub-central governments as the deliverers of services as well as the complexity of relationships between them and with the central institutions of the state.

Here, however, comes the first crucial point of his argument. There is, he says, no single centre. There are rather "multiple centres or policy networks", each of which is centralised but between which there is little coordination (Rhodes 1988, p.3). In other words, for Rhodes, it is, strictly, inappropriate to talk of 'central-local' relations as if there were a centre which could control local agencies. The system is more complex and fragmented than such a phrase suggests. For him, 'central-local' relations are a product of many such networks, linking centre and locality often apparently independently of each other, but also influencing each other in ways which are rarely clearly understood by those involved.

Rhodes argues that there is a paradox at the heart of the UK state system between the tradition which assumes that the centre knows best and the reality of the centre's dependence on local and other forms of sub central government for the delivery of services. In other words, there is a tension at the heart of the system constructed in the post war period. And for him that tension can best be explored in terms of policy networks,

which link the centre and localities, rather than in terms which stress the importance of local (or indeed, national) party politics. These policy networks can be defined as the systems of (vertical) linkages between professionals (and associated councillors) and civil servants responsible for policy within departments of central government. There are separate networks in the fields of education, housing and social services which do not always interact with each other.

The point Rhodes makes most strongly is that the interests of these policy networks and the civil servants within them may not coincide with the interests of the government more broadly defined. Policy networks are service based and cut across hierarchies (being represented at different levels of government) within what Rhodes describes as a 'differentiated polity'. Each side of the network is dependent on the other: at local level officers are dependent for finance from the centre, and at national level civil servants (and ministers) are dependent on local officers for implementation. At central level departments (or parts of departments) may act as representatives of those they also manage. So, for example, the government may be arguing strongly for reductions in spending as part of an overall economic programme, while at the same time, civil servants

within the Department of Education and Science, or the Department of Health are arguing with their counterparts at local level for increased spending on particular schemes. The Department of the Environment is in a particularly uncertain position. In arguments with the Treasury, it is likely to support more spending in the areas for which it is responsible through local government, yet in its relations with local government it acts as the policer of budgets - indeed it effectively plays the Treasury role. And matters are made still more complex because, even in this context of departmental pressure for retrenchment, some parts of the Department - those responsible for housing, planning and other spending areas - may also be encouraging increased spending. These internal conflicts of interest are reflected through policy networks.

Rhodes' analysis stresses the continuity of central-local relations in the post-war period. He charts an unfolding if uncertain logic which goes back to the way in which the welfare state was put together, as pieces were tacked on in a rather haphazard way onto existing state institutions. Rhodes argues that the organisation of both central and local government was characterised by functional divisions (along service lines, such as education, social services or planning) so that links between levels were

also on functional rather than territorial lines, through policy networks which included professionals as well as politicians. This is another crucial difference between his approach and that of those who focus on local (territorial) politics, since they tend (with a few exceptions) to ignore or minimise the significance of professionals. Arguably, it is the professionals rather than (or perhaps as well as) the leading politicians who matter in policy making, particularly where it involves interaction with the departments of central government (Houlihan's analysis of housing policy and central-local relations tends to confirm this, Houlihan 1988, pp. 209-216. See also Rosenberg 1989, Ch. 6, for a discussion of the role of Treasurers in this context, and Laffin 1986 for a more general discussion of professionalism and central-local relations). Since much of the 'common sense' of local government and its operation is actually drawn from professional practices and the ways in which they define what is possible, it is essential that the role of professionals is adequately acknowledged.

The work of Duncan and Goodwin is effective in exploring local government as state form (i.e. the social relations expressed through state apparatus). It is less effective in developing an analysis of the state

apparatus (i.e. its physical institutions) (Duncan and Goodwin themselves develop this distinction. Duncan and Goodwin 1988, p. 39). But what goes on inside the apparatus is also important in determining the practice of local politics and influencing the allocation of resources between groups. Local state theory emphasised that the state was a form (or sometimes even a crystallisation) of social relations, rejecting the view that it was simply a 'machine', but one consequence of this was that there was little interest in the power of politics within the machine (within the apparatus) (see, e.g., Clarke and Cochrane 1989). Yet those politics are themselves an important expression of the social relations which constitute the local state.

Rhodes' approach views central-local relations as a system, within which moves at one point have to be accompanied by moves elsewhere in the system if it is to survive in a reasonably stable form. He acknowledges that the territorial basis on which local government is organised has helped to make the system unstable in the 1980s. According to him, central government tried to use the system of sub-central government to carry through its own policies, particularly in reducing spending on welfare, without "comprehending the differentiated nature of the system" (Rhodes

1985, p.55) - that is the range of policy networks within it and the pressures on territorially based local governments to sustain just the same forms of spending which it was trying to cut. Whilst, therefore, Rhodes acknowledges that the localness of local government may be of importance at particular key points, he minimises its significance at other times. Although he acknowledges the relevance of territorial politics as one of the pressures which have helped to undermine the post war arrangements, Rhodes is less concerned to identify anything specifically local about local government, or indeed to argue that any specific policy areas are appropriately (or necessarily) handled at that level, in fact referring to sub-national or sub-central government rather than local government as an object of study and stressing the contingent nature of political outcomes (see, for example, Rhodes 1985). His writing successfully highlights the significance of professionals within the political system, and is able to explain change and obstacles to it through the analysis of what is almost an enclosed political system, linking localities, and the departments of central government in a complicated web of negotiation and bargaining in which the various sides are not always clear, and there is often a high degree of confusion and uncertainty

(see Rhodes 1988, particularly Ch. 5, for the the most developed expression of this approach).

Rhodes approach is in many ways a persuasive one, but it also focuses too narrowly on the operation of a relatively enclosed system and on adjustments and bargaining within it. The major changes in UK politics seem to impinge on it from the outside, and even the pressures of local politics are somehow extraneous to it. In principle, perhaps it could be extended to include a wide range of different groups within policy networks, but the strength of the approach is also one of its weaknesses - a stress on professional officers and existing political elites masks it difficult to acknowledge and incorporate analysis of the ways which the nature of these elites and access to them may change over time. His approach tends to emphasise the ways in which the system works and the inherent tensions within it, but make it more difficult to understand the significance of locally based politics. The partnership models we have discussed above imply the possibility of locally based policy networks developing which are not necessarily part of any wider national policy network of the sort Rhodes discusses. In general, he plays down the independent value of local politics, instead suggesting that a growth in

local or territorial politics tends to be a consequence of shifts elsewhere in the system. His explanation for the growth of local challenges to the centre in the 1980s is essentially that the centre did not understand how to manage the the system properly. Within his analysis, therefore, local politics is a product of the operation of the central-local government system, rather than a key element within it. Yet, this means his explanation of change in the 1980s loses some of its force. Some of the new departures at local level have to be introduced from outside the model, because they cannot be explained from inside. It increasingly looks as if local politics does have a life of its own, to the extent that changes at local level may have forced responses from the centre as much as central initiatives encouraged rebellion at local level. Despite their obvious value in the analysis of central-local relations network models like that of Rhodes have the potential disadvantage that it is difficult to introduce factors which are not initially represented as having key roles within the model, however important they later turn out to be.

4.3 Conclusion: tying it all together

If Duncan and Goodwin exaggerate the importance of local factors, and

local politicians in particular, Rhodes seems to underestimate them. More important, perhaps, if Duncan and Goodwin overemphasise the necessity of analysing local government as part of wider processes of capitalist development (and particularly of uneven development), Rhodes seems to underestimate the significance of these factors - they are external to his system, yet it clearly breaks down precisely under the impact of wider economic and political pressures, which encouraged the 'squalid' intervention from the centre which he describes (Rhodes 1985). Separately the approaches of both Duncan and Goodwin and of Rhodes have significant weaknesses. But their arguments may be complementary rather than necessarily contradictory and in what follows we hope to draw on both of them to provide an alternative way forward through the analysis of local politics in the 1980s and into the 1990s. Although not explicitly referring to this debate, Gurr and King usefully identify two different 'types' of potential autonomy for local government or local politics: the first is concerned with the extent to which it can act independently of local economic and social interests and the second with the extent to which it can act independently of pressures from the centre or the demands of key (national) professional groups (Gurr and King 1987, pp. 43-73, King and

Pierre 1990, pp. 2-12). Duncan and Goodwin tend to draw our attention to the second form of autonomy, and Rhodes to the first, but a more rounded approach demands that effective consideration is given to both.

In the chapters which follow an attempt is made to explore both sides, by looking first at the wider contexts of political change at local level in the U.K., before narrowing the focus to the particular experience of Sheffield in the 1980s. Earlier (at the start of Chapter 3) Doreen Massey is quoted, setting herself and others the difficult challenge of "holding on to both the general movement and the particularity of circumstance" (Massey 1984, p. 8). Although she is principally concerned with issues of economic restructuring, meeting this challenge is no less important for the development of an adequate understanding of the workings of local politics. The chapters which follow, therefore, seek to explore the implications of taking Massey's challenge seriously as part of the process of analysing political change at local level.

Notes.

1. Although Rhodes acknowledges the similarity of his approach to that of

Cawson, he is reluctant to accept the 'corporatist' label because he is unconvinced that it is sufficiently distinct from 'neo-pluralism', a label with which he professes to feel more at ease (Rhodes 1988, pp. 98-99).

2. For an earlier discussion of the importance of 'private power' in U.S. urban politics, see Newton 1976a. Newton stresses the role of 'economic notables' in urban redevelopment programmes, in particular, those associated with "the building, real estate, banking and property development businesses" (Newton 1976a, p. 50).

Chapter 5. The political and institutional context

Local government in the U.K. is an integral part of a wider political system, and this chapter sets out to identify the context in which it developed in the 1980s. The argument runs through two key aspects of this. It considers, first, the place of local government within a hierarchy of central-local relations and, secondly, its position within the welfare state constructed after the war. It considers some of the conflicts between central and local government in the 1970s and 1980s but questions whether they can simply be explained as reflecting an increased centralisation of policy-making.

Until the mid 1970s, local government was widely seen as a relatively unproblematic part of the British political system, despite attempts to 'modernise' it in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Its task was to deliver a fairly clearly defined set of services (including primary and secondary education, council housing and personal social services) at local level, reasonably efficiently and with a degree of (local) democratic accountability. It was not a subject of high political (or academic) controversy. Much discussion of local government started by emphasising that it handled large budgets and was 'a multi-million pound' business, in

order to show that it was an important part of the U.K. state system, before going on to explain its especially democratic nature despite low levels of voting in local elections (see the summary in Dearlove 1979, p. 28-50). A clutch of official reports and royal commissions at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s concentrated on suggesting ways of improving managerial efficiency and 'stream-lining' decision-making, within larger (more business-like) authorities (the reports were generally known by the names of those who chaired the relevant committees: Maud 1967, Mallaby 1967, Redcliffe-Maude 1969, Wheatley 1969, Macrory 1970, Bains 1972, Paterson 1973).

The principles underlying the division of labour between central and local government were never clearly stated, but this merely seemed to confirm the lack of controversy surrounding them. The convenient fiction was maintained that local councils were responsible for the allocation of resources at local level, as long as in practice they did not seek to challenge the position of central government and the priorities of central government departments. Bulpitt confirms that, "Like children," local authorities "were expected to be 'good', respectable indoors and outdoors, and respectful to the centre. Misbehaviour was frowned upon, but its consequences were conveniently left unclear" (Bulpitt 1989, p. 66).

In England and Wales the 1972 Local Government Act created the system (of county councils, metropolitan counties, districts and metropolitan districts alongside the GLC and London boroughs which had already been created in the 1960s) which survived with little change until the mid 1980s, and similar reforms took place in Scotland a year earlier to produce that country's system of regional and district councils. In Northern Ireland local government was a matter of greater controversy, because it was more clearly associated with the distribution of resources (including jobs) based on political and sectarian patronage. While reforms in the rest of the UK in the early 1970s created larger and, arguably, more powerful forms of local government, in Northern Ireland at the same time councils were effectively marginalised, left with few mainstream responsibilities, and housing and social services were transferred to regional agencies and joint boards. Throughout the U.K., however, the fact that discussion of local government tended to focus on organisational questions, boundaries and the sharing out of service responsibilities rather than disagreements over political programmes, merely confirmed the position of local government as a political backwater.

But after the mid 1970s local government became the focus of major debate throughout the UK and had an increasingly high profile not only at

local level, but in the national newspapers, radio and television. There was a remarkable transformation, in which by the early 1980s 'excessive' council spending was blamed for the country's economic problems, councillors were heavily criticised for financial irresponsibility and local government officers attacked for inefficiency and constructing 'bureaucratic empires' on the basis of self interest (see, e.g., Butler and Pirie 1981, Forsyth 1981, Pirie 1981, Walker 1983). Central governments increasingly set out to control and limit the spending of councils. A series of reform packages was introduced to achieve this, to redirect the priorities of service departments and to encourage the creation of alternatives to local authority provision. A layer of councils (the metropolitan counties and the Greater London Council) was abolished in England in the mid 1980s, and 'ratecapping' was introduced in one form or another across the UK at around the same time. This gave departments of central government final say over levels of local taxation. At the end of the decade the community charge (or poll tax) was imposed as a replacement for the old rating system everywhere except Northern Ireland, and in England and Wales the old commercial rating system was replaced with a nationally levied business rate. Yet, despite all these upheavals, local government finance remained a matter of national controversy. The

failure of the community charge and the uniform business rate as alternatives to the old rating system was one of the factors which led to the resignation of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister in 1990, and local government 'reform' looks set to be a matter of continuing debate.

5.1 Hierarchies of government: the power of the centre

Institutional approaches to local government in the UK stress its position within a hierarchical structure, with initiative flowing from and rules being set by the centre. Byrne, for example, stresses that local government "is subordinated to the national authority which is Parliament" (Byrne 1983, p. 19). Rose has also summarised the position briefly, concluding that, "the power to delegate or revoke delegated power remains in the hands of the central authority" (Rose 1982, p. 50). Similarly one implication of the local state theory of the 1970s was that the institutions of local government remained subordinate parts of the capitalist state (see Cockburn 1977, p. 46). Although some might have disagreed with his theoretical starting point, few from either tradition would have disagreed with Miliband's emphasis on the weakness of local government, giving it a subordinate role within a wider capitalist state

system and stressing the extent to which local and regional governments have "become ever more markedly dependent on central power and subordinate to it" (Miliband 1969 pp 171-77).

The whole of the U.K.'s post-war experience seems to confirm the force of these arguments. The formal (legal) structures of government in England and Wales are among the most centralised in Western Europe. Unlike the Federal Republic of Germany, for example - where article 28(2) of the Basic Law states that, "Local authorities are to be guaranteed the right to regulate all matters concerning the local community within the framework of law and on their own responsibility" - there is no constitutionally guaranteed role for councils. In Britain local government is formally the creature of central government legislation, and has been delegated the task of undertaking various responsibilities laid down in successive general and specific statutes, from Local Government Acts to Housing Acts. Despite the arguments of the Bains and Paterson Reports at the start of the 1970s (which maintained that local authorities should be responsible for managing processes of social and economic change in their areas), local governments in England, Wales and Scotland¹ have never been given a general competence for the areas covered by them, except in very limited terms, such as those laid down in Section 137 of the Local

Government Act 1972, which gave councils the power to spend up to a maximum of the product of a 2p rate on matters which were to the benefit of some or all of their local residents. The Local Government and Housing Act 1989 removed this general competence, but for the first time gave a specific power to councils to engage in economic development activity. This new power was itself severely restricted by explicitly penalising spending through local authority sponsored development companies and partnerships and by limiting overall spending on economic development. In one White Paper on local government taxation, it was claimed that Britain was a 'unitary' state, with the implication that central government could (and should) effectively control levels of spending by local councils (Department of the Environment/Welsh Office 1983, para1.2) (see also Foster et al 1980, which considers some of the problems of managing local government finance in a 'unitary' state, from the perspective of neo-classical economics). A further implication which could be drawn from these arguments was that central government also had the right (and possibly duty) to limit and even determine the activities on which it could be spent. In the 1980s this was confirmed most clearly in the decision simply to abolish one set of councils (the metropolitan counties, including Greater London, the West Midlands and South Yorkshire). As legal creations

of the centre, they could also be destroyed by the centre.

The growth of local government in the years after 1945 as part of the post-war welfare state can be seen to have reinforced its subordinate position within a state hierarchy. One consequence of the initial post-war nationalisations was that previous powers - for the running of hospitals, electricity and gas supply - were removed. Water and sewage responsibilities went in the early 1970s. They were replaced with expanded responsibilities in the fields of education, housing and town planning, which were explicitly handed down from above. The personal social services also became local authority responsibilities, although it was not until after the Seebohm Commission reported (in 1968) that separately identifiable social services departments became the norm. In some areas - such as education and social services - there are clearly identified central inspectorates which help to reinforce the subordinate position of local government. And in town planning, the possibility of appeal to the relevant minister makes the formal position equally clear.

Named officers and committees are delegated specific responsibilities within legislation. This is probably clearest in the case of the police where police committees only have limited control over chief constables and the committees include representatives of other groups

(such as magistrates) as well as elected councillors. In education, too, (the biggest spender within local government), responsibilities are clearly specified. The relevant councils are labelled local education authorities, the membership of education committees is statutorily defined to include a range of co-optees and directors of education are given responsibilities which make her/him responsible to the centre as well as to the council of which s/he is an officer. Similar responsibilities exist within the personal social services, particularly in the field of child protection. Finance officers, too, are given the responsibility of ensuring that the spending programmes of a council can be met by the income which the council can reasonably (and legally) expect to receive in the course of the year. In some circumstances (if councillors were ignoring this fiduciary responsibility) finance officers would be expected to take over the running of their councils. Legal and finance officers must ensure that no spending is 'ultra vires' (i.e. outside the specified powers of local government).

There is still a fairly uniform pattern of service provision and administrative organisation across the country (allowing for the separate legal frameworks of England and Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland). Local authorities throughout the country do similar things. Most spending on education, social services and housing goes on the same sorts of

activities, and most local authority spending goes on these three areas.

Most local authority service provision is statutorily based, and follows national guidelines of one sort or another, whether formally supervised by national inspectorates (in education and social services) or informally policed by professional organisations (such as the Royal Town Planning Institute or the Institute of Housing). In some cases, such as local authority accounting there is both a national system of supervision through a network of District Auditors and the Audit Commission and a strong professional organisation in the form of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (see Rosenberg 1989, particularly Ch. 3, for a discussion of professionalism within the local government budgetary and financial control systems).

Much of the debate within the professions of local government continues to stress that the aims of spending are similar in different places, even if the levels are different. A commentary on spending patterns prepared for the Chartered Institute of Public Finance in 1988, for example, stresses that the main explanation for different levels of spending seems to lie in differences in population density between councils (Ashley-Smith 1988, pp12-14). The Audit Commission focuses on perceived differences in efficiency between councils, and even the replies

from local authorities to the strictures of the Commission are generally couched in terms which stress the different needs of different areas, rather than different political priorities (see, for example, Audit Commission 1987 and the reply from the Association of London Authorities 1987). Ken Livingstone (leader of the GLC from 1981 until its abolition in 1986) has pointed out that even at the height of the council's radicalism, the bulk of its spending continued to go on traditional activities, such as the fire service. Even if the most costly of its 'new' activities (i.e. industry and employment) had been cut, he stressed, the average ratepayer would still only have been saved some 15p a week (Livingstone 1983 p. 334).

District auditors - who are independent of the councils and employed by a separate agency (in England and Wales, the Audit Commission) - also have the role of ensuring that councils behave with propriety in their financial dealings. In particular, they have the power to penalise councillors and officers for "wilful misconduct". In the mid 1980s Lambeth and Liverpool councils were prosecuted for "wilful misconduct" over the way in which they conducted the setting of their local taxation in 1985. It was argued that they "wilfully" delayed setting the rate in such a way that significant income was lost to the council and councillors were

individually and collectively surcharged to repay the sums of money allegedly lost as well as the costs of the court cases - amounting to about £¹/₄m in the case of Lambeth and over £¹/₂m in the case of Liverpool.

The financial position of local government also suggests a subordinate role in other ways. Until the late 1980s councils in England, Scotland and Wales did, of course, have access to significant locally generated taxation whose levels they could set (albeit within increasingly tight limitations). But even then, most local authority spending (over sixty per cent) was funded by central government grant. This was emphasised the reforms of the late 1980s because the collection and distribution of business taxes (the uniform business rate) in England and Wales, too, became a central responsibility, so that a little over twenty per cent of local authority income was locally determined. The decision made in 1991 to fund still more local government expenditure from VAT simply reinforced this general trend. Meanwhile legislation in the mid 1980s enabled the Secretary of State for the Environment (the department responsible for local government in England and Wales) and the Secretary of State for Scotland (where new legislation was first introduced) to fix the levels of spending by named local authorities, which went outside certain centrally determined guidelines. This effectively meant that levels

of local taxation were also determined centrally (hence the process was labelled ratecapping in England and Wales, while in Scotland concern was expressed about the ways in which a 'hit-list' of local authorities was chosen for attention by the Scottish Office). Despite the moves at the end of the decade to new forms of local taxation (the community charge or poll tax) which were intended to increase local accountability and reduce the need for direct central intervention, these powers were retained.

The programme of the third Thatcher government elected in 1987 was open about its ambitions to reorganise and restructure Britain's local government system. No area of local government responsibility escaped scrutiny: in education proposals included the introduction of a national curriculum, encouragement to schools to opt out of local authority control making them more directly responsible to the Department of Education and Science, support for city technology colleges also outside the local authority system, and a move towards local management of schools within tight financial guidelines; in housing, limitations on council house building were reinforced, while existing council estates were encouraged to leave local authority control, and move into the housing association sector, or to be taken directly into central control in housing action trusts; the existing rules requiring some local government services and maintenance activities

to be provided on the basis of competitive tendering between independent bidders was extended to cover more areas; and, yet another set of changes was introduced for the finance of local government, which ensured that councils had still less control of the amount of revenue they could raise at local level, since although the new business rate was to be collected by local authorities, it was ultimately paid to the centre and subsequently to be redistributed between councils on the basis of a centrally determined formula.

So, it looks as if the legal framework within which local government has to operate is highly restrictive and hierarchical. The various grant regimes and methods of calculating GREAs (Grant Related Expenditure Assessments) and SSAs (Standard Spending Assessments), coupled with powers to cap first rates and more recently community charge levels, suggest a significant increase in central political power, and the bureaucratic power of the Department of the Environment and its officers, at least as far as individual local governments are concerned. Power is delegated from above, and the centre retains the ability to delegate responsibility, to limit spending and to police what is being done. The legal formalities of British local government remain highly restrictive and since the mid 1970s, the control mechanisms introduced to reinforce these have

become more and more extensive (see, e.g. among many others, Burgess and Travers 1980, Duncan and Goodwin 1988 Ch.5, Jones and Stewart 1983, Newton and Karran 1986, Travers 1989).

According to Stewart, "in place of local choice will be the decision of the Secretary of State who is seeking...remarkably unrestrained power" (Stewart, J. 1984, p.9). It was claimed by some that the, in retrospect rather limited, provisions of the Local Government Planning and Land Act marked "the beginnings of the wholly centralized state" (Burgess and Travers 1980, p.188). Others commented that, "the British system of government was already highly centralised in 1979, and subsequent legislation has produced a quantum jump towards a more powerful and centralised state," and went on to suggest that, "Britain stands in sight of a form of government which is more highly centralised than anything this side of East Germany" (Newton and Karran 1985, pp.121 and 129). Authors influenced by neo-marxist approaches took a similar line. For them, local government - or the local state - represented a potential base for opposition to the policies of the Thatcher governments in their attempts to restructure the welfare state, so the legislation represented a major attempt to curb "the *potential* of local authorities to initiate and demonstrate change", encouraging the erosion of local autonomy (Duncan

and Goodwin 1988, p. 277). Whatever the label it was agreed that councils seemed to be losing their scope for independent action in the early 1980s. Most actors within local government agreed with writers from the School for Advanced Urban Studies when they commented that government legislation to limit levels of local taxation as well as expenditure were "a major threat" to local democracy (SAUS, 1983. Conclusion).

But there are also fundamental flaws in this picture of a centralised hierarchical system, some of which come out clearly even in the high period of centralisation in the 1980s. Most obviously, of course, if the system already were as hierarchical as suggested, it is not clear why there was such a high degree of controversy and conflict in the period. The experience of the 1980s suggests that, even if one accepts that the centre was successful in the end, it faced serious problems in imposing its will. Local authorities of all political stripes seem to have resisted the imposition of authority from above (see, e.g., Audit Commission 1984 which modestly notes the ways in which local authority treasurers sought to evade the clearly stated intentions of the centre). The 1980s were characterised by the introduction of a vast amount of legislation directed towards local government, which suggests - at the very least - that imposing central control was not an easy process.

Nor is it clear that attempts at centralisation have been successful. In some respects they may have been - for example, in reducing capital expenditure on housing by local authorities to a trickle, encouraging a shift to private sector provision and, incidentally, effectively encouraging an increase in levels of homelessness. In real terms, capital spending by local authorities on new house construction fell by 83% from 1976/7 to 1987/8 (Hills and Mullings, p. 158). But even in those areas, the problem has sometimes simply been shifted to the management of other agencies, themselves resistant to pressure from above. Central government now has to manage housing associations, training agencies, schools and polytechnics whose activities were previously imbedded within elected local government. It is not yet clear that fragmenting these responsibilities and encouraging different forms of accountability has increased central control. Intuitively, at least, it seems possible that it may decrease the ability of the centre to control or manage its new creations - particularly as in most cases their legal position is more ambiguous because they straddle the public, private and voluntary sectors.

Even in the sphere of elected local government, the results of the reforms of the 1980s were less clear cut than might have been expected. Neither levels of spending nor employment (particularly white collar

employment) decreased significantly over the decade. Despite a decline in capital expenditure (that is spending on equipment, buildings and infrastructure financed by long term loans), Stoker notes that current expenditure (that is spending on services, mainly financed by tax and grant income and short-term loans) actually rose in real terms up to the end of the 1980s (Stoker 1988, p.171) and numbers employed also rose, although there was a decline in the employment of manual workers and a growth in part-time working (Fleming 1989). Local authority current spending on personal social services rose throughout the decade even as capital spending fell (Evandrou et al 1990, p. 219).

Despite the pressures for uniformity, there remained some scope for variation. The amount spent per head of the population clearly did vary significantly from place to place, and does so more in some areas of spending than others. Duncan and Goodwin point to the extent of variation in subsidies to council house rents between councils in the mid 1980s (Duncan and Goodwin 1988, pp. 6-9). Glennerster and Low note that differences in spending per pupil in primary and secondary education actually increased between the mid 1970s and the mid 1980s (Glennerster and Low 1990, p. 69). The variation in expenditure growth on personal social services also increased between the early and mid 1980s (Evandrou

et al 1990, p. 225). In the early 1990s there were still substantial variations in spending between different councils, reflected both in the SSAs (Standard Spending Assessments) estimated by central government and in the levels of community charge (or poll tax) levied in different places. It is shifts at the margins in terms of spending which often capture attention and help to differentiate authorities from one another.

But, in any case, some differences may not be so easily expressed in terms of budgets and levels of expenditure. There are also increasingly differences in the ways in which services are delivered: for example, some councils (such as Kent and East Sussex) have encouraged the use of voluntary sector and private sector provision (see, e.g. Holliday 1990, Young and Hadley 1990); others (such as Islington, Tower Hamlets, and Walsall) have developed forms of decentralised provision and accountability (see, e.g., Hoggett and Hambleton 1987, Lowndes 1990, Seabrook 1984). Some authorities have chosen to develop 'new' initiatives - e.g. in economic development, or the recycling of waste - while others have concentrated on more traditional activities.

The development of new initiatives at local level did not suggest an area whose significance was withering, despite the defeats for the local authority left, first in Scotland and then England and Wales in the

campaigns over ratecapping in 1985-6 and in the abolition of the Greater London Council (GLC) and the metropolitan county councils in 1986. The attempt finally to resolve the conflict through the imposition of the community charge (or poll tax) in 1989 (in Scotland) and 1990 (in England and Wales) also had ambivalent results - both forcing many local authorities into making sharp reductions in their budgets and, finally, forcing central government to retreat by promising to fund more local government services through an increase in levels of centrally collected VAT. Paradoxically that retreat may result in greater centralisation than any of the earlier reforms because it implies a still greater shift away from the raising of finance at local level, leaving ninety per cent of local government finance in the hands of central government.

5.2 Local government and the welfare state: professionals and policy networks

Despite the widely acknowledged importance of central power, it is misleading to believe that the centre can effectively control local government, at least as long as it exists as a separately elected and area based system. Starting from the notion of a unitary state, and focusing on

the legal framework misses the importance of territorially based political power (such as that suggested by Duncan and Goodwin 1988), as well as underestimating the extent of political independence available to non central institutions in making decisions and allocating resources (see, e.g., Gurr and King 1987).

It is also profoundly ahistorical, refusing to acknowledge the incremental way in which local government developed, from below as much as by legislation from above, particularly as urban areas expanded in the nineteenth century, incorporating more and more land, and undermining the cosy (and often corrupt) arrangements of the past (see, e.g., Fraser 1976 Conclusion, Lee 1963, pp. 21-43, Smith 1982, pp. 7-19). Indeed, in the mid nineteenth century, Fraser argues that the "natural location of politics" was the city, suggesting that it was only with the involvement of the working class that political activity in the UK became dominated by a national agenda (Fraser 1976, p. 283). In other words, the construction of a national hierarchy was always a political process, rather than the product of legal or constitutional necessity.

Although the underlying hierarchical structure of central-local relations cannot be ignored, the need to move beyond hierarchical models is emphasised by looking at the history of local government since 1945

from a rather different perspective - one which does not start from formal structures, but seeks to set the local government system within wider political and economic processes affecting the UK. Four main periods of development can be identified over this period. The first, which stretches roughly from 1945 until the mid 1960s, saw local government consolidated as part of the welfare state.

In the 1930s and 1940s elected local authorities lost many of the powers they had previously enjoyed. In 1934 councils lost control over poor relief; in 1936 local responsibility for trunk roads was removed; in 1940 it was the administration of supplementary benefits which was removed; responsibility for hospitals was lost in 1946; powers to provide electricity supply in 1947, and gas in 1948 (this process is charted clearly in Dearlove and Saunders 1984, p. 381). But the conclusions sometimes drawn from this are misleading. Dearlove and Saunders conclude that "the clear trend was one of erosion of their responsibilities, and this has continued ever since" (Dearlove and Saunders 1984, p.381). Dunleavy, too, stresses "massive losses of local service control" as a result of the policies of the 1945-51 Labour government (Dunleavy 1984, p. 54). As description these comments may be perfectly accurate, but the implication that local government was less important as an element in the state system

of the immediate post war period is highly inappropriate.

This is the case for two main reasons. First, it misreads the significance of the changes which took place, by implicitly assuming that it was existing local government services which were effectively 'nationalised'². The main arguments about welfare and industrial issues during and immediately after the Second World War were focused on rather different issues than local versus central control. On welfare the issue was whether and how to construct a system of universal benefits. Whatever the conflict between centre and some localities in the 1930s, no-one would argue that the social security system proposed by Beveridge was principally aimed at undermining troublesome local authorities, since, whatever its other faults, its stress was clearly on the provision of universal benefits coupled with a commitment to full employment (see Beveridge 1942). For the electricity and gas industries the issue was how to construct efficient industries capable of providing cheap fuel to industry (see Addison 1977, for a discussion of some of these debates). Certainly, there was a move away from localism in some areas as a result of this, but it was largely the consequence of seeking to introduce and develop a more universal set of policies, building on the experience of municipal collectivism, and operating on a much larger scale than had

previously been possible, for example in the formation of the nationalised industries as public corporations along the lines of Morrison's London Transport. And the local provision of welfare was simply overtaken by attempts to generalise provision, instead of leaving it as a permissive patchwork. To focus on the ways in which local councils lost responsibilities, therefore, is to miss the point. In almost all the cases listed by Dearlove and Saunders (certainly after 1945) the issue was not how to restrict spending in these fields, but, rather, how it might more effectively be extended and institutionalised.

It would also be a mistake to try to identify any clear logic underlying the decisions made about which responsibilities were to stay with local authorities and which were to be removed from them. In principle, there is no reason to suppose that local authorities could not have retained responsibility for the distribution of supplementary benefit or social assistance (as is the case in the Federal Republic of Germany), nor that central government could not have taken on responsibility for the primary and secondary education system (as is the case in France, whilst in the Federal Republic of Germany it is handled through the *Länder*³). Until quite late in the day, it was still a matter of debate whether the National Health Service should be largely left to senior medical professionals to run, under

the nominal control of appointed area boards, or be the responsibility of elected councils in joint boards (see, e.g., Foot 1973, pp. 118-119, 131-133). But the process of reorganisation at this time also suggested a substantial expansion of all the activities concerned - for example, taking over the voluntary sector as well as local authority run hospitals in the case of the NHS, the private as well as the local authority run electricity suppliers in the case of those industries, and launching a far larger system of social security, national insurance and unemployment benefit in the case of what had previously been poor relief. Those who continued to favour local or municipal control were generally also those opposed to the scale of reform involved. Although there remained a few determined localists (see, e.g. Robson 1948, Ch 1), their views found little room for expression in the context of massive support for the new initiatives.

There is little contemporary evidence that the changes were introduced to undermine the power of elected local governments, although in the case of some municipal enterprise concern was expressed, not about local democratic control, but about the scope for excessively close relationships between councillors, contractors and business (see, e.g., Bulpitt 1983, p. 148). Bulpitt's interpretation of relations between central and local government in the 1920s and 1930s stresses the extent to which,

particularly within the Conservative Party, but also more generally, local and national politics were divorced from each other, on the assumption that 'real' politics took place at national level, while local politics was a necessary evil through which welfare services were delivered with the help of central grants. He argues that "Popular culture was either indifferent to, suspicious of, or directly antagonistic towards, elected local government" (Bulpitt 1989, p. 66. See also Bulpitt 1983, pp. 147-155).

A possible exception to this broad conclusion is to be found in the restructuring of poor relief in the early 1930s, where the conflicts between local and central authorities are well recorded. There is substantial evidence from the inter-war period that local pressures were important in the generation of welfare provision at local level, with substantial variation between local authorities (see Branson 1979, Macintyre 1980, Mark-Lawson et al 1985). Even here, however, caution may be advisable since the extent of conflict is easy to exaggerate. From the perspective of the Labour Party, the 1930s can also be seen as a period of steady consolidation of what Gyford describes as municipal labourism, which implies a negotiated settlement between central and local government rather than a process of conflict and centralisation (Gyford

1985, pp. 4-13). One plausible interpretation of the post war reforms is that they built on and generalised some - although not all - of the initiatives pursued by the most active local authorities in the inter-war period.

The second reason why focusing on the removal of powers is misleading, is that it was accompanied by a massive expansion of responsibilities for local government within the welfare state which dwarfed previous levels of activity. In the twenty years after 1945, education and housing spending came overwhelmingly to dominate local authority budgets. By the 1950s, these together accounted for around 60% of council spending, whereas in the 1940s, the figures were closer 35% (Dunleavy 1984, Table 3.2). And it is also important to note that the sums of money involved had also risen dramatically in real terms. Overall spending by local authorities as a proportion of national income and the share of local spending as a proportion of government spending were also rising over the post-war period. Local authority spending as a proportion of national income rose from around 9% in 1950 to over 13% by the end of the 1960s, and as a proportion of public expenditure from around 26% to nearly 31% over the same period (Newton and Karran 1985, Table 1.7). Levels of local authority revenue spending almost quadrupled in real terms between

1940 and 1970 (Keith-Lucas and Richards 1978, Table 7.3). This suggests - intuitively at least - that local government was not fading into insignificance over the first part of post-war period.

Equally important, perhaps, local government and its agencies became an increasingly important part of the everyday lives of most people in the post war period. The 1944 Education Act ensured that most children attended local authority schools until the age of 15. And, following the Town and Country Planning Act 1947, all new development had to pass through a planning system based at local authority level. Increasingly large numbers of people lived in council housing, particularly in the wake of large scale slum clearance programmes in the UK's major cities. Although they were only brought together in specialist departments for the first time in the early 1970s, in practice there was a continuous growth of local authority based personal social services, which were a practical expression of the 'cradle to the grave' supervision promised by the welfare state. The Children Act 1948, for example, significantly increased local authority responsibilities, beyond the poor law's provision for 'pauper children', moving away from the existing patchwork of voluntary and charitable provision (Keith-Lucas and Richards 1978, p. 48).

Focusing on a supposed reduction in the significance of local

government after 1945, makes it difficult to grasp the extent and direction of its post war growth. Implicit within Saunders' (and to a lesser extent Cawson's) development of the 'dual state' thesis, for example, appears to be the assumption that direct involvement by the state in productive activities is somehow more 'important' than an involvement in social consumption or social control: thus a withdrawal from those areas seems to confirm a more secondary status for local government, as well as a greater scope for pluralist politics at local level, precisely because developments at that level cannot "easily be integrated into a nationally organised class-based movement centred on the politics of production...the attempt to fight national issues through local government reflects a failure to understand this distinction" (Saunders 1984, p.45).

Yet, Saunders' own stress on the 'specificity' of local consumption politics also fails to connect with its linkage into the wider structures of the welfare state, which are crucial parts of national politics. As Rhodes points out, what he calls sub-central government (in practice mainly local government) "was the prime vehicle for building the welfare state up to the 1970s" (Rhodes 1985, p. 40). Such a conclusion is vital in categorising the first phase of post war development, because it places local government at the heart of the post war political compromise which has

been called the Keynesian welfare state (see, for example, Mishra 1984, Offe 1984), and also provides a crucial context for understanding the restructuring of local government in the UK since the 1960s.

The period up to the mid 1960s, then, was one of expansion and consolidation. The second period, between the mid 1960s and the mid 1970s, was largely characterised by attempts to modernise local government, as part of more extensive strategy of state backed social and economic modernisation, fostered first by the Wilson governments of 1964-70, and then by the Heath government of 1970-74. In the case of local government stress was placed on the perceived inefficiency of local government and the low calibre of its councillors and officers. It was argued strongly that the old structures bequeathed from the nineteenth century were inadequate for the mid twentieth century, when, as John Benington (1976) suggested and many politicians confirmed, local government had become big business. Modernisation meant that larger units were required and new forms of management (particularly corporate management) had to be introduced. This was the era of strategic planning, the creation of metropolitan county councils and the GLC in England, and the formation of large generic social services departments. In the most 'progressive' authorities, there was a move away from departments to

much larger directorates, and everywhere new chief officer management teams were set up and chief executives appointed (Dearlove 1979 Part 2 provides a valuable summary of debates current in the late 1960s and early 1970s. See also Benington 1976, Cochrane 1989b, pp. 98-102, Cockburn 1977 Chs 1 and 4).

In retrospect, the period of attempted modernisation looks like the last gasp of a social democratic political order whose leaders assumed that it would go on forever. By the middle of the 1970s it was already clear that the favoured strategy could not succeed in a number of areas, particularly in the context of continued relative economic decline for the UK. The clearest expression of this was to be found in the need for the Labour government in 1976 to draw on financial support from foreign banks and the International Monetary Fund, and - as a consequence - to accept the imposition of a strong deflationary package (as well as the first rumblings of monetarism). The commitment to the 'regeneration of British industry' through a strong industrial policy and the National Enterprise Board did not survive into the late 1970s (see, e.g., Leys 1989, Ch 6 and Joint Trades Councils 1980). Mishra's comments about the crisis of the welfare state are also apposite for the particular case of local government: "The state's ability to manage the mixed economy, of which

the social welfare sector is an integral part, is in serious doubt. In many ways it is this loss of confidence which is at the heart of the crisis...The legitimacy of the welfare state is in serious doubt" (Mishra 1984, pp. xiii-xiv. See also Beer 1982).

Local government was among the earliest areas to be hit by the new financial restrictions. As early as 1975, Tony Crosland, then Secretary of State for the Environment, announced that cuts were needed in local government spending: "We have to come to terms with the harsh reality of the situation which we inherited. The party's over" (quoted in Crosland 1983, p. 295). It was the start of a period (stretching into the mid 1980s) characterised largely by attempts to increase central control over local government finance. There is substantial doubt about the extent to which this centralisation has been successful, since, as argued above, it has also encouraged an organisational culture at local level which reinforces attempts at evasion (see, e.g., Stoker 1988, Ch.7). Whatever the results in terms of spending and staffing levels, however, there can be no doubt that the end result has been an increased involvement of the departments of central government (in England, particularly the Department of the Environment) in the details of local government finance. Rhodes points to the "pre-eminence of the Treasury and the treatment of *local* expenditure

as a matter for national decision" (Rhodes 1986, p.239).

Despite the attempts to increase central control, however, it is the difficulty central government has had in achieving these ends, even in the high period of centralisation as a strategy, which is most striking. This tends to support Rhodes' argument that there are overlapping networks of bargaining linking different levels of government, with each level dependent on the other to achieve its own ends, in ways which sometimes encourage inconsistency between different parts at each level. According to him, there is an inherent conflict between the assumption within the UK state system that the centre makes the final or authoritative decisions and a practice which implies a high degree of interdependence and a complex process of interaction, organised through policy networks which are frequently dominated by professionals (Rhodes 1981, 1988. See also Laffin 1986). The dominant level of government in the British system - particularly in England and Wales - is always likely to be the centre, since it is able substantially to influence the level of resources allocated and available to local government as a whole, and, now increasingly, to particular councils. But, as the Conservative governments of the 1980s discovered, it is not easy to control spending by edict.

The implications of Rhodes' model can be seen clearly in the lessons

he draws from the experience of the 1980s, when conflicts between central and local government were at their most marked. He argues that:

1. Changes in the central-local government system were not the product of any one process (such as economic decline) but of interaction between a number of processes. Among others, which he identifies as important, was the tension between the UK's economic decline and the institutionalisation of interests within policy networks, which made it difficult to translate economic priorities into changes within the spending arms of the welfare state;

2. He stresses that the conflicts of the 1980s were not simply the product of Conservative government policies, but of the longer term piecemeal accretion of responsibilities at local level, which encouraged a fragmented system at national level, alongside centralisation within policy networks;

3. Relations between different levels of government became entangled with processes of economic management by central government, which came to dominate over the initial bases for co-operation between them (i.e. the delivery of particular services);

4. The introduction of the new political agenda of Thatcherism also helped to undermine the old arrangements, as proposals for privatisation challenged the assumptions of continued growth on which they were based

- as Rhodes puts it: "Party ideology has been the grit in the well oiled machinery of the policy networks";

5. Because the policy networks are represented within the departments of central government as well as outside it, the policies of the centre were often characterised by confusion and uncertainty - the centre failed to speak with one voice;

6. Government actions helped to undermine the longer term insulation of local and national policy elites from each other. Local elites were under challenge and responded with an increased politicisation and readiness themselves to challenge the centre, instead of using the policy networks to negotiate;

7. The hierarchical 'command operating code' taken up by the central government in this period was at variance with the differentiated polity (or form of political life) with which it had to deal. "The command code," says Rhodes, "represents a failure to comprehend that British government is a multi-form maze of interdependence. To operate a code at variance with this reality is to build failure into the initial policy design". (This summary is based on Rhodes 1985, Section 4).

Within policy networks it could be argued that there were identifiable centres, even if their interests were not always consistent with the

stated ambitions of the 'centre' as defined by Prime Minister or Cabinet. But some of the new areas of policy development taken up by the left councils in the early 1980s still less susceptible to control from the centre, precisely because they were not statutorily based, and, in effect, **outside** existing policy networks. This was particularly true of spending on economic development. Even in the 1970s, central government was concerned that spending in this area was taking directions which might not be in line with its priorities, and a committee was set up within the Department of the Environment to assess its importance, although the final report tended to minimise it (Burns 1980).

One of the difficulties associated with the local government system in the U.K. - at least for those trying to control or direct it from above - is that its institutional and legal arrangements appear to require a delegation of specific powers from above, but in practice what local governments do helps to determine what is possible (and legal). A great deal of the day to day activity of councils and their employees exists in the cracks within the system, which allow action to be taken, unless it is specifically prohibited. Local economic development activity has survived and developed since 1945 on the basis of a number of legislative silences rather than a series of clear powers. Some activity has drawn its

legitimacy from planning legislation (for example, finding alternative premises for non-conforming uses, taking the general planning interests of an area into account), whilst others has been a consequence of housing legislation, as land for development has become available. Councils have often had, or taken, responsibility for managing their land holdings with a view to economic development (for example with powers under the Local Authorities (Land) Act 1963). Since the late 1970s, powers relating specifically to inner city development have been extensively used, and the definition of the inner city has often been very widely defined. And, of course, until the late 1980s Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 was used extensively to justify expenditure defined (by the council) as being in the interests of the residents of their area, even if it did not bring additional resources⁴.

5.3 From centralisation to fragmentation?

Since the mid 1980s, the direction of change within local government has been less easy to characterise, but it has certainly moved beyond centralisation. It can perhaps best be summed up as a process of fragmentation. Government legislation has encouraged a proliferation of

agencies and organisations, breaking up the old multi-functional structures of local government. The earliest examples of change involved the privatisation of various direct labour services, particularly those activities involving manual work, ranging from refuse collection and waste disposal to cleaning and catering. The extent of this can be exaggerated (as Stoker 1988, p. 186, points out, drawing attention to the limited value of contracts actually awarded in 1986/7), but the direction of change is clear enough and has encouraged many local authorities themselves to set up independent or semi independent agencies to bid for contracts, thus keeping them 'in-house'. More recently there have been moves towards local management of schools and some encouragement has been given towards the opting out of schools from local authority control. Again the significance of 'opting out' lies not so much in the number of schools which take up the 'option' - at first, in any case, likely to be small - but rather in the model it confirms. In this, schools will be nominally under the control of governors, with their own budgets, buying in (sometimes privatised) services from councils. In practice, power at school level is likely to lie mainly in the hands of the headteacher and, in larger schools, senior staff with increased emphasis placed on financial control. In social services, similar processes have been underway. Over time it is clear that most

residential provision - for the old and young - has been shifted from direct provision to provision in the private or voluntary sector and to care at home, whether in the form of foster care and adoption at one end of the age scale, or 'community care' at the other. There has been a significant growth in privatised care and the voluntary sector, which also (e.g. in the case of the NSPCC) increasingly seems to be taking on statutory responsibility (see, e.g. Hadley and Hatch 1981, for a discussion of early moves in this direction, and Papadakis and Taylor-Gooby 1987). Similarly in housing, there was first a move to the sale of council houses, accompanied by a centrally imposed virtual freeze on new building, and now a growth of voluntary sector housing in the form of housing associations, sometimes directly sponsored by local authorities with the involvement of councillors and officers in senior positions (see Houlihan 1988).

The new context for local policy-making at the end of the 1980s and into the 1990s is by no means clear. On the one hand, the constraints imposed by the centre seem tighter, particularly in financial terms, where the local scope for raising funds is more restricted than ever. Austerity has come to dominate budgetary discussions. On the other hand, there are signs that smaller units may be able to take new initiatives, within a tighter framework of financial control. At local level, this is reflected in

moves towards decentralisation, and institutional fragmentation, as well as renewed emphases on service provision, of individuals as customers, rather than clients. The moves are not only taking place as a result of pressure from above, but also on the initiative of councils themselves, as they have tried to adjust to the changed political realities of the 1980s and 1990s. Some of the leading (strategic) officers in local government have been keen to take up the notion of 'enabling' authority first suggested by Nicholas Ridley when Secretary of State at the Department of the Environment, and to reinterpret it to give them a more important role at the centre of a network of providers (see, e.g., Brooke 1989a and b). Indeed, it is possible to view both the centrally imposed changes and those developed from below as responses to similar pressure, from different starting points and, possibly with different conclusions. In considering the particular case study of Sheffield, we shall be focusing directly on these issues with a view to investigating processes of interaction between centre and locality, as well as within the locality. It will be possible to follow the development and expansion of a new policy area during a key transitional period of political change.

Notes.

1. In Northern Ireland the responsibilities of elected local government are still more tightly circumscribed, with many key functions (including housing, education and social services) being the responsibility of appointed quangos or area boards. After 1973, overall local authority budgets were 10% of what they had been before the reforms of the early 1970s. Tomlinson comments in this context that for local politicians (particularly the anti-unionists, for whom the local government reforms made election and control of councils more achievable), "it is a hollow victory to be in command of a minimal budget and relatively inconsequential services, such as street cleaning, managing cemeteries and leisure centres" (Tomlinson 1980, p. 117). See also O'Dowd 1989, pp.129-133.
2. A similar misreading appears in a number of publications produced by groups eager to encourage an expansion of responsibilities for local government in the 1980s. Although there may be some justification for using inappropriate historical examples in the course of political polemic, such an exercise remains unconvincing whoever does it (see, e.g., Blunkett and Jackson, K. 1987 Chs 2 and 3, which provides one of the strongest and

most persuasive developments of the localist case, commenting that Labour's post war focus on national rather than local administration was a "tragic mistake". See also Blunkett and Green 1983).

3. In the early 1990s (following from the Education Reform Act 1988) responsibility for education in the UK also began to shift from local authority to central government, with emphasis on the 'opting out' of some schools from local education authorities, the moving of polytechnics to independent status, and proposals to move further education away from council control.

4. Only since the passing of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 have councils had specific powers to undertake economic development, and the main reason for such power being given to them seems to be to restrict rather than encourage such activity, since it specifically limits the revenue which can be used for these purposes and introduces a series of new rules which make it much more difficult to set up local authority companies (particularly where those may generate financial returns).

Chapter 6. Political restructuring in the 1980s

The previous chapter focused on the context provided for local politics by constraints and structures imposed from above. It was primarily concerned with issues usually discussed under the umbrella of central-local relations. This chapter goes further to consider some of the ways in which the practice of local politics began to change during the 1980s. In particular it looks, first, at the relationship between local politics and the wider political debates of the decade, before turning to consider the restructuring of local government and the local state as part of wider processes of restructuring within the U.K..

6.1 The importance of politics: Thatcherism and the growth of local socialism

There is no doubt that in the early 1980s, local authorities became more ideologically differentiated across the political spectrum, particularly in urban areas. No longer were disputes solely, or mainly, about which party might be better at administering a set of agreed

services. The nature of the services themselves and their modes of delivery were genuine political issues. Because of their key role in the development of the Keynesian welfare state through the post-war period, once the old certainties of social democracy began to be called into question - as they were in the context of economic problems through the 1970s - local authorities were increasingly forced to redefine their own positions as well (see Cochrane 1989a for a discussion of the political crisis of the 1970s). Privatisation, value for money and council house sales were the main issues for the right, while for the left, local authorities became a battle ground for the defence and extension of collective provision. At the same time, some elements of the left sought to develop policies at local level which challenged the logic of 'Thatcherism' and began to show new alternatives for Labour.

Although the growth of politicisation within local government was probably more noticeable - and certainly more noticed in the press and in academic literature - on the left, it was also significant on the right.

There were identifiable Thatcherite urban citadels in Dudley (until 1986), Wandsworth, Westminster and (briefly) Bradford, which played major parts in developing aspects of 'new right' politics at local level (see Mather

1989 for a discussion of what such a politics might mean). Over a longer period new initiatives in line with such thinking were developed in counties, such as Kent and East Sussex, particularly in social services (see Hadley and Hatch 1981, Young and Hadley 1990). In the late 1980s, there have been substantial changes within many Conservative controlled county and district councils in the South of England, with private sector models of organisation being brought in for many service areas (Smith 1989 suggests ways in which this might develop on the basis of his experience as Housing Director of one such district. See also Geeson and Haward 1990). Butcher et al identify three possible 'types' of post Thatcherism Conservative local authority:

- the contract authority which is committed to the delivery of existing services through private or voluntary agencies the issuing of contracts to them. This type of authority is likely to seek to reduce costs by limiting services and will have little interest in notions of community: "the link between the voter and the councillor will be confined to holding down expenditure and the level of the community charge";
- the enterprising authority which remains committed to notions of public service, but does not accept that this implies support for local state

provision, instead seeking to work with voluntary and private sector agencies. Such an authority retains an interest in developing new services, rather than merely being a 'passive' provider of services, in part in order to attract new residents who see a role for municipal spending in sustaining the 'quality of life';

- the business corporatist authority, which sees itself as serving the wider interest by developing closer relations with the business and commercial sectors. Such an authority might remain rooted in collectivism (and direct service provision) but its ambitions would be defined in terms of those with which it develops partnership arrangements (Butcher et al 1989, pp. 161-165).

But, through most of the 1980s, with a Conservative government in power, the realities of electoral arithmetic have tended to mean that few Conservative councils have survived in urban areas, and even in the shires there was a dramatic rise in support for the Alliance parties in the mid 1980s, which left many councils under no overall control. Many of those councils which have remained under Conservative control have continued to be dominated in practice by their chief officers rather than any party political pressures. The growth of three party politics in the 1980s, left

Labour marginalised and irrelevant in some areas, but much stronger in others - in its traditional and more recent heartlands, in the urban authorities, inner London, the North of England, South Wales and Central Scotland (see Green, G. 1987, pp. 203-4).

The left faced particular difficulties in coming to terms with the political crisis of the late 1970s. It was tied closely in popular consciousness to the postwar experience of the welfare state, the state built by Labour after 1945. The challenge represented by the rise of the 'new right', the apparent failure of Keynesianism to deliver economic prosperity and the electoral success of 'Thatcherism' was not an easy one to deal with. As Stuart Hall pointed out in a series of influential articles, in this context the 'new right' developed and was developing a genuine social base. Margaret Thatcher had, he said, 'won the battle for hearts and minds' (Hall 1983, p.9. See also Hall 1988, particularly Part 1 where these arguments are more fully developed). Leys, too, charts the political success of Thatcherism in the early 1980s (Leys 1989, Ch 7. See also Gamble 1985, pp.136-153, and a critical response to Hall's analysis from Jessop et al 1988, which nevertheless acknowledged the power of Thatcherism. For more sympathetic accounts of Thatcher's project see

Johnson 1987, pp. 155-159 and Green, D. 1987, Part 2).

It was this realization which gradually pushed some in the Labour Party to reconsider previously unchallenged political assumptions.

Although there was little hope of Labour's recapturing power at national level, the party continued to control many urban local authorities. The left at local level had to adjust to the reality of Conservative control at the centre and, licking its wounds, also had the task of rebuilding its bases of support after the electoral defeats of 1979 and 1983. From a political backwater through the 1950s and 1960s, local government became an important area of political development for Labour. It was one of the few fields in which the left still had access to power and it was also the terrain on which many of the most vital battles over the welfare state took place in the 1980s. Even in the late 1980s it was still possible to argue that "the alliance around radical labourism has changed the contours of local and national politics, it set the new left agenda of the 1980s" (Campbell 1987, p.10)¹.

The left came to power in several councils at a time of crisis in urban government, particularly in the inner cities and other older industrial areas. The selective impact of Britain's economic crisis left the inner

cities with major concentrations of unemployment and devastated the country's industrial heartlands (see, e.g., Robson 1988, Ch.1 and Martin 1988). Poverty, too, was increasingly concentrated in Labour controlled authorities. In most areas, housing stock left from the 1950s and 1960s was falling apart, in need of major repair and renovation (and sometimes demolition). In 1980/81 and then in 1985, major riots (or uprisings, see Gilroy 1987, pp 236-44) took place in many of Britain's cities. Somehow local authorities had to respond to these problems with the increasingly limited resources at their disposal.

The development of left politics at local level was also a reflection of changes taking place nationally within the Labour Party. The political turmoil experienced by the Labour Party at the end of the 1970s undermined some of its most basic assumptions. Attempts to construct compromises through state level bargaining between unions, employers and the state in the 'social contract' had failed. At the same time as a left current was developing at local level, there were also major conflicts nationally - expressed, for example, in campaigns to increase internal democracy within the Party and to elect Tony Benn as Deputy Leader, as well as in the dramatic departure of the 'Gang of Four' (Roy Jenkins, David

Owen, Bill Rogers and Shirley Williams) in 1981 (see Seyd 1987, Ch. 2 for a discussion of some of the roots of these conflicts, and Ch. 4 for an outline of some of the battles in which the Labour Party left was engaged in the the early 1980s). Many of the councillors and activists who came to be decribed as local socialists were as interested in contributing to and influencing national debates through their local initiatives as they were in developing them at local level.

Not all Labour councils moved to the left in this period, although most were influenced by ideas generally associated with the left of the Labour Party. As well as Sheffield, in the early 1980s councils such as the Greater London Council, Hackney, Islington, Lambeth, South Yorkshire, Stirling and Walsall among others had reputations for being 'socialist'². But it is misleading to imagine that there was any single ideology which can be labelled 'local socialism' or 'municipal socialism'. There was no identifiable municipal socialist programme which was implemented up and down the country between 1981 and 1986. The differences of emphasis between the policies adopted by the different councils were often as striking as any ambitions which they shared.

In developing local enterprise boards, for example, some (like the

West Midlands County Council) aimed to set up regional versions of Labour's National Enterprise Board, whilst others (such as West Yorkshire) wanted to create regionally based merchant banks; some (like Lancashire) were looking to the model of a regional development agency, while others (such as the Greater London Council) were concerned to use planning agreements to influence decisions made in the private sector (see Cochrane and Clarke 1989). In developing social policy initiatives, some were principally concerned to maintain spending and avoid cuts, while others stressed the need for new initiatives through decentralisation and the setting up of neighbourhood offices. Some emphasised the need to develop equal opportunities policies within their organisations, whilst others suggested that this was self indulgent given the problems faced by those the councils were supposed to be serving. Some (like the GLC) started from the belief that it was necessary to build new sets of political alliances, moving beyond traditional labour concerns with the industrial working class, whilst others (such as Sheffield) tended to stress the need to return to this base, which it was argued leading Labour politicians frequently ignored (see Chapter 10 and Wainwright 1987, Chapter 3).

In some cases the reputation and the labelling seem to have reflected

Conservative government hostility, rather than any explicit commitment to socialist initiatives. South Yorkshire, for example, was given the title of 'People's Republic' largely on the basis of its consistent resistance to increasing public transport fares, under Labour as well as Conservative governments. But in other policy areas it remained resolutely traditionalist - its members and officers showed little interest, for example, in developing new approaches to economic policy. A brief experiment in encouraging equity investment in local firms from the local authority pension fund through the County Regional Investment Scheme resulted in only one investment, although the idea was noticed outside the county and played some part in the development of proposals for municipal enterprise boards, taken up at the end of the 1970s (see, e.g., Minns 1980, pp98-99, Minns and Thornley 1977, Minns and Thornley 1978, p.68). The county council remained committed to policies of economic development through advertising, property development and the provision of serviced premises. And its members and officers remained suspicious of more radical proposals (see Alcock et al 1981 and the 'official' post-abolition history of the council, which confirms this wider traditionalism, Clarke 1987).

Although it is important to avoid exaggerating the trend towards

'local socialism' at the start of the 1980s, it is nevertheless possible to identify similar policy developments across a range of councils at this time which deserve to be acknowledged (and this is reflected in a number of publications, including Blunkett and Jackson, K. 1987, Boddy and Fudge 1984b, Cochrane 1986b, Gyford 1985, Lansley et al 1989, Green, G. 1987, Wainwright 1987 as well as more ephemeral texts, such as Labour Co-ordinating Committee 1981, 1984 and 1988). Gyford effectively sums up the position:

"The nature of this local socialism is best understood not in terms of a single coherent ideology but as a syndrome or a set of associated characteristics. These characteristics would include: a concern for issues hitherto absent from or marginal to conventional local government, such as local economic planning, monitoring the police, women's rights, and racial equality; a disdain for many of the traditional ways of conducting local authority business; a view of local government as an arena both for combating the policies of a Conservative government and for displaying by example the potential of grass roots socialism; and, perhaps most fundamentally, a commitment to notions of mass politics based upon strategies of

decentralization and/or political mobilization at the local level"

(Gyford 1985, p.18).

Gyford goes on to acknowledge that not all local socialist councils were committed to all of these policy areas, and that some of them were taken up with enthusiasm by councils not normally considered particularly left-wing.

Three main features united the local socialist councils. First, their leaders wanted to present an effective alternative to the policies of the Conservative government. They wanted to show in practice that there was an alternative which worked. Where the Thatcher government and the 'new right' stressed the role of the market, the left authorities stressed the value of state intervention - of collective rather than individual solutions. Secondly, they wanted to present an alternative to the experience of Labour in power in the 1970s. Many activists first developed their radicalism as part of the process of fighting cuts in service provision and financial support imposed by the Callaghan government in the late 1970s. They rejected the corporatist policies which had involved the striking of bargains between union leaders, big business and the state behind closed doors, and stressed the need for wider democratic involvement and the

political mobilisation of ordinary people. Thirdly, they were committed to a path which valued local initiative in its own right, as an alternative model to centralisation and the market, offering new opportunities for democratic control. Although they had few illusions about local government as it existed, many of the activists (whom Gyford labelled the 'new urban left') shared the ambitions of David Blunkett and Keith Jackson who emphasise, "the need to build democracy; since democracy is more than the mere right to cast a vote at elections. Active politics of this kind has commonly only been available to privileged elites and powerful interests. Local politics is about its extension so that people can run their own affair, adopting an increasingly broad perspective as confidence in democracy grows" (Blunkett and Jackson, K. 1987 p.5). Wainwright distinguishes between two 'Labour Parties', one of which has a "vision of socialism based on power built up from below" (Wainwright 1987 p 266), but the other of which (represented by the Parliamentary leadership) is still more pragmatic and committed to managing change from above. Her case studies of varying local experiences (Wainwright 1987, Ch. 3) confirm the strength of the first vision among the local socialists, although they also suggest that there may be rather more than two 'parties'

within the Labour Party at local level.

Although each council only picked up some of the elements of the local socialist package, its main elements can be listed very simply (if not exhaustively) under three main headings, building on the summary provided by Gyford:

a) The development of a new economic policy

Traditionally councils have taken little or no direct responsibility for their local economies. The local socialist councils deliberately took on such responsibilities, partly as a counter to 'new right' arguments against state involvement in the economy. They wanted to prove that such intervention could create jobs in a way that 'laissez faire' policies did not. Indeed, the objective was to show that the policies of central government actually increased unemployment, whilst appropriately targeted public sector intervention could reduce it.

But the left's local economic strategies were also intended to offer an alternative to traditional **Labour** policies, which had usually been centralist and concerned with planning from above, with little concern either about the local impacts of national decisions or about the position of workers in state supported enterprises. The new strategies were

intended to create jobs, but also to encourage new - more democratic - forms of work, the development of socially useful products, and the increased employment of systematically disadvantaged groups, such as women, ethnic minorities, the disabled, gay men and lesbians. Central elements of the economic policies were to be led by social, rather than narrowly defined economic priorities (see Blazyca 1983, particularly Ch. 5 for an early discussion of the left initiatives and the ideas behind them. See also Boddy 1984, Cochrane 1986a) (These initiatives are discussed in more detail in the following chapter).

b) The development of a new social policy

The left councils were concerned to defend their parts of the welfare state from centrally imposed cuts in spending. Indeed, it was the pressures for these cuts which first encouraged the growth of activist groups at local level and led some councils into conflict with central government (Gyford 1985, pp28-33). But they were also aware that the normal operation of the welfare state by local authorities did not make it very easy to defend. So they wanted to open it up - to democratise and decentralise service provision (see, e.g. Beuret and Stoker 1985, Hambleton and Hoggett 1984, Hoggett 1987b, Hoggett and Hambleton 1987, Seabrook

1984). Undermining the power of the professionals by making them more accessible and accountable to those they were supposed to serve was an important element of this. And alongside it went an understanding that the authority itself was a major employer, capable of implementing reforms both for their own sake and as an example to others. This was particularly important in the development of equal opportunity, anti-sexist and anti-racist policies within some authorities.

c) The mobilisation of local communities

It was argued that service delivery within the British welfare state had typically been characterised by a top down paternalism, frequently coupled with significant elements of social control. And the provision of services by local government had been no exception to this general rule. Services had been provided to the individual, household or client group, often on the assumption of 'good behaviour' as defined by a set of professionals. In the 1980s, the municipal socialists tried to challenge this. They attempted to encourage active involvement from the communities they 'served', both as a means of strengthening resistance to the policies of central government and as a symbol of socialist development. For them, socialism was about this involvement as much as -

or even more than - the provision of services and without it they felt that existing services could probably not be defended, and certainly not extended. David Blunkett argued that 'to mobilise the community in defence of itself and positively in favour of a new way forward, sustained campaigning is required' (Blunkett 1981b, p.33)³.

The development of initiatives at local level by particular councils and activists cannot be divorced from these broader political debates. They provide an important part of the context within which pressures for change developed and new initiatives became possible. But it is not possible simply to predict which councils would be influenced by notions of local socialism, nor to describe its particular features in each place on the basis of these wider political debates. Sheffield's version of 'local socialism' was unique, as well as being part of a wider political movement.

6.2 From Fordist to post-Fordist local government?⁴

It is increasingly clear that approaching the analysis of change within the local government system as if it were independent of wider social and economic shifts is fundamentally misleading. At the very least, changing

economic and social structures may restrict or open up opportunities. And they may also be providing the foundations for more extensive adjustments. Setting change in the wider context of post-war restructuring is a necessary step in the identification of more significant changes in the operation of urban politics.

It is widely acknowledged that the position of local government within the U.K. state system changed significantly over the 1980s but the nature and direction of change was less clear. Similar points could be made about attempts to analyse the nature of wider changes in economy, society and politics over the same period. One set of arguments has clustered around moves towards fragmentation and flexibility in the labour process, away from models based on the mass production and consumption of relatively standardised products and away from Keynesian welfare states. Some of these arguments have been set within theoretical frameworks which suggest a move from modernism to post-modernism (see, for example, Lash and Urry 1987), whilst others have stressed the growing importance of 'flexible specialisation' yet explicitly rejected the use of wider systemic labels (see, for example, Hirst 1989a). Approaches which use the terms Fordism and post-Fordism (or neo-Fordism) as the axes around which to

construct their arguments seem to be the most developed of the positions with respect to UK local government⁵.

Hoggett and Stoker, in particular, have used these theories to analyse the changing structures of local government. Hoggett was one of the first to pull the discussion of local government into debates about state restructuring and the crisis of Fordism. His work has been taken up and used by others in developing their arguments about notions of local government in the post Fordist era (for example, it is acknowledged as a crucial base by Geddes 1988 and, rather more cautiously, by Stoker 1989). Hoggett's contribution is significant, therefore, not only in its own right, but as a crucial marker on which others have been able to build and generalise.

Hoggett's arguments draw largely on what Elam (1990) describes as a neo-Schumpeterian approach to the debates about Fordism and post-Fordism. This explains the history of capitalism as a series of technological revolutions, following a pattern of long waves of economic development associated with a succession of technological or techno-economic paradigms in which the driving force of wider social and economic change is rooted in technological change. Post-Fordism is associated with the

rise of a new paradigm organised around information technology. Within this model, Fordism was largely characterised by assembly line mass production, while post-Fordism means the rise of flexible manufacturing and networking between agencies, with the help of information technology. The new 'technological style' based around the extensive introduction of information technology is said to encourage (possibly require) the spread of more decentralised production methods, and more participative working practices (Hoggett 1987a, p 221).

Hoggett's argument proceeds by a process of analogy from a broad statement of what has happened and can be (more or less) noted in the production sphere to what has happened or is happening in the welfare state and local government within that. The analogy is based on the notion that 'professionals' operate as 'people processors' in the 'assembly line' through which the Keynesian welfare state produces and delivers its services. Hoggett argues that, like production in the private sector, production in the Keynesian welfare state has been inflexibly geared towards the output of a few standardised products with economies of scale constantly emphasised. He suggests that the system resembled Fordism without Ford - "a kind of mongrel paradigm based on an uneasy

marriage between a pre-Fordist craft (professional) productive system and a Taylorised (rational-bureaucratic) system" (Hoggett 1987a, p.223).

Local government, able to resist the logic of the previous technological revolution, is, according to this argument, ripe for the shifts promised by the present one. Within this model the old sites for resistance become the seedbeds in which the new technological revolution will flourish, and Hoggett predicts the development of "new organisational and managerial forms strikingly reminiscent of the newer 'hi-tech' companies of the M4 corridor: leaner and flatter managerial structures, decentralised 'cost and innovation centres' (i.e. district or neighbourhood offices with their own devolved budgets, powers over recruitment, performance indicators etc.), enlarged and more generic roles, team working, flexibility and informality, responsive back line support to the front line staff and so on" (Hoggett 1987, p.225).

There are a number of problems with this version of the post-Fordist model, particularly as it applies to local government and the local state. One is simply the implied determinism: it appears that these changes are bound to take place, although local governments are offered some choice in the ways in which they are taken up. As Elam notes, within this model, "the

history of capitalism remains one where 'new' techno-economic forces always do the initial acting and 'old' socio-institutional frameworks the eventual reacting" (Elam 1990, p.12). This emphasis is carried over by Hoggett into his discussion of local government in the UK, which means that political processes tend to be relegated to secondary status. This makes it difficult to explain why particular technological opportunities are taken up at one time rather than another, and also tends to understate the extent to which the direction of change remains contested.

The second major weakness of Hoggett's argument is the way in which it draws an analogy between the spheres of production and the local welfare state. Superficially this may be quite attractive, but it does not hold up very well under sustained scrutiny. Hoggett's acknowledgement of a 'mongrel paradigm' itself undermines it. A key point about 'street level bureaucrats' - to borrow Lipsky's eloquent phrase (Lipsky 1979) - such as teachers and social workers is precisely that they are expected to make decisions based on individual discretion where bureaucratic rules do not apply very well. They are trapped between their 'clients' and their 'employers', with only their 'professionalism' to pull them through. So, the people processors become elusive at local level. Even in housing offices it

is the discretion and its arbitrary use rather than rational-bureaucratic decision-making which is perceived to create the problems. The detailed differences and discretion make it difficult to process people en masse. Instead of pointing up a similarity, in effect the arguments are most successful indicating a sharp set of differences. Yet clearly the welfare state professionals are products of Fordism in any definition of the term, since without the (Fordist) welfare state they could not exist.

Not all of these criticisms of Hoggett's approach can be applied to all those using the terms Fordism and post-Fordism. There are many Fordisms and, consequently, also many post-Fordisms. Lipietz, for example, would be highly critical of a generalising theory of this type and explicitly distances himself from long wave and systemic analysis commenting that "the emergence of a new regime of accumulation is not a pre-ordained part of capitalism's destiny, even though it may correspond to certain identifiable 'tendencies'" (Lipietz 1987, p.15). There is a fundamental difference of emphasis between those who focus largely on the production process (as Hoggett does) and those who are more concerned to focus on the interaction between regimes of accumulation and modes of regulation (such as Lipietz and others within the regulation school)⁶. Even while each

is apparently discussing the same phenomena, and using what looks like the same terminology, they have quite different theoretical starting points. Lipietz stresses that "regimes of accumulation and modes of regulation are chance discoveries made in the course of human struggles and if they are for a while successful, it is only because they are able to ensure a certain regularity and a certain permanence in social reproduction" (Lipietz 1987, p.15). Lipietz is by no means clear that a neo- (or post-) Fordism is currently being constructed. Certainly it is an open question rather than a necessary process. Nor is he convinced of the form which will be taken by any resolution to the crisis of Fordism. One option might even be a more centralised and authoritarian form of Taylorism (Amin 1989, p.14).

Stoker sets out to explore recent changes in UK local government within the broad framework of the 'regulation theories' associated with Lipietz and Aglietta among others. His arguments are qualified, pointing to the possibility of counter tendencies developing, and stressing that he "does not see the reform programme as rising automatically from the processes of social and economic change. Rather ...it is part of the Thatcher Government's response to these processes. The aim is to create a local

government compatible with the flexible economic structures, two-tier welfare system and enterprise culture which in the Thatcher vision constitute the key to a successful future" (Stoker 1989, p.159).

Although he refers to Hoggett and Geddes, the conclusions he draws from them are modest. He returns to many of the familiar examples of change, in particular marketisation, contracting out, and a new emphasis on consumers. But he approaches them from a rather different angle, stressing the extent to which they may parallel shifts in the private sector, going so far as to suggest that with information technology it is not too difficult to see local government as a sort of public sector Benetton, through which information may pass out to a set of service providing contractors (p.166). His stress is on the development of a dual welfare system within which the weak (and the poor) will have to rely on increasingly minimal local welfare while the better off may gain access to private (or better public) welfare, by topping up with their own resources. He is less concerned than others to identify possible strategies of resistance (although he does refer to the possible development of a wider public service orientation and community government, which, of course, he discusses more fully elsewhere). His post-Fordism is a rather more bleak

(and overall more convincing) vision than that of Hoggett.

But some of the weaknesses of the model utilised by Hoggett are also apparent in Stoker's arguments. Most important, the nature of Fordist local government remains elusive. It is in this context that Hoggett's arguments are introduced, and even as qualified by Stoker, they do not quite fit. The allegedly Fordist model stressing functionalism, uniformity and hierarchy listed by Stoker (1989, p.151 and borrowed from Stewart) may be an accurate enough reflection of the formal structures of U.K. local government, building as they do on a legislative framework bequeathed from the nineteenth century or expressed in the ideal types of Weber, but they bear little relationship to what actually happened in the UK after 1945. Elsewhere Stewart has acknowledged both the lack of uniformity and the importance of internal bargaining within authorities, noting the importance of competing professional ideologies (Stewart 1983, p.102) and, of course many of the detailed decisions of those allocating resources in housing departments, social services departments and 'delivering services' in schools have involved significant variation. Stoker, too, in another context himself seems to argue for a rather more complicated picture of organizational politics within local authorities (Stoker and

Wilson 1986).

Nor can one be sure of the direction of change predicted in the UK. One consequence of the new arrangements may be an increase in formal hierarchy for some groups leaving still less scope for practical initiative at the level of delivery (for example because of the imposition of tighter financial control systems, see, e.g. Flynn 1987). The spread of compulsory competitive tendering seems to have had the effect of imposing financial discipline on key agencies within the council, offering senior managers a way to increase labour discipline. As Dunleavy points out, it offers a way for the chief officers to undermine the position of a troublesome set of - blue collar - subordinates (Dunleavy 1986, p.21). Evidence from the first rounds of compulsory competitive tendering suggests that between 61% (in building cleaning) and 97% (in catering for education and welfare) of contracts have been awarded to councils' own direct service organisations, with a higher proportion of higher value contracts also being awarded to those organisations (LACSAB 1990).

Nor is it clear that privatisation of this type - based on the issuing of contracts - necessarily encourages flexibility, even when contracts are awarded to private suppliers. Stewart argues that government by contract

may reduce the scope for flexibility by fixing arrangements for relatively long periods and making renegotiation difficult (Stewart 1989). Close sets of relationships between favoured suppliers and particular local governments may also be encouraged. Some of the dangers here have been highlighted in the experience of 'management buy outs' from new town development corporations (which are some way further down the line than most councils). The National Audit Office has expressed concerns about the ways in which a number of new town corporations privatised many of their professional activities, while, in effect, continuing to issue contracts to their previous employees (Comptroller and Auditor General 1990).

It is also unclear who will have the effective power in the new arrangements in the issuing of contracts. Here the comparison with Benetton and Marks and Spencer may be helpful since such purchasers clearly have power over suppliers dependent on them for large orders. It is not so clear that local councils are in a similar position. The experience of the GLC's economic policies, on which Murray draws to argue for the opportunities offered by flexible specialisation, suggest that may be possible to intervene effectively in those areas where the authority is dominant, but they also show how difficult it is to be effective in sectors

dominated by other agencies (Murray 1987).

Another set of questions arises from considering the rather equivocal position of the voluntary sector. In some cases, such as the larger housing associations, voluntary organisations become equal partners in negotiations with councils, and - more important - central agencies (Houlihan 1988, pp. 48-54). In others - at community level - the relationship may involve the construction of new forms of control, since voluntary organisations are highly dependent on their financial backers and may find themselves under far more extensive forms of inspection (see, Hadley and Hatch 1981, pp157-159). As dependent - almost client - organisations they are likely to exercise a high degree of self censorship, instead of surviving as independent and autonomous organisations working alongside local governments.

One of the central problems with arguments which start from the identification of a wider move from Fordism to post-Fordism, is that it is possible to acknowledge the existence many of the changes, without yet being convinced that they have taken place as part of that shift. There is a danger of constructing a model of change to justify the development of a favoured strategy and give it the gloss of inevitability. The cost of

acknowledging that a wider structural shift is taking place and locating local government within it, is that the whole process becomes a 'necessary' one, however that 'necessity' is qualified. There is a danger that every piece of evidence for fragmentation and every claim for flexibility is accepted at face value because it fits into the model. At its worst, the approach seems to reduce marxism to a series of binary oppositions which can be listed and catalogued without being questioned, and into which reality then has to fit. Its theoretical basis relies on identifying the replacement of Fordist systems by their opposites: so, instead of mass production, flexible specialisation; instead of centralisation, decentralisation; instead of hierarchy, participation; instead of unity, fragmentation; and so on (see, e.g. Murray, R. 1989, Harvey 1989, Ch 9, Rustin 1989, pp.56-57, Stoker 1990). But this does not amount to a convincing theory of social change.

Regulation theory is such a protean beast, however, that in some versions at least these criticisms may find little purchase. Jessop identifies seven regulationist 'schools' which he manages to boil down to four types of approach (Jessop 1990a, pp. 155-162). Some argue that the strength of regulation theory is precisely that it is open ended - Elam, for

example, emphasises that it encourages an "enhanced interest in the peculiarities of historical/cultural contexts and greater attention to 'ethnographic detail'" (Elam 1990, p. 33) and stresses the point that for its French originators, even if Fordism can be identified, the shape of its likely replacement remains open. Jessop et al argue that the UK was never fully Fordist and is, therefore, unlikely to become fully post-Fordist (Jessop et al 1989, p.99). They identify features which look more like pre and post-Fordism in the post-war period, and point to some elements of Fordism likely to survive and even expand into the 1990s. Unlike Stoker, they argue that Thatcher obstructed, rather than assisting with, the UK's shift to post-Fordism (p.83). As the qualifications accumulate the problem then becomes identifying what the theory has to offer that is fundamentally distinctive.

If the model is transmuted - as Stoker has now suggested it should be (e.g. Stoker 1990, p. 249) - to an ideal type, then it becomes little more than the juxtaposition of two typologies with little to say about the dynamics of change. It begins to look as if the theorists want to have it both ways: on the one hand the theoretical approach implies a structural shift, whose key features can be identified from first principles; but as

soon as its proponents are accused of determinism, or it is suggested that some of the changes it appears to predict are not taking place, then it becomes increasingly slippery. As a result, it is difficult not to agree with Sayer when he suggests that, "the trouble with concepts like fordism, postfordism and flexible specialisation is that they are overly flexible and insufficiently specialized" (Sayer 1989, p.666).

6.3 From welfare state to enterprise state: towards a local corporatism

It remains important to locate local government within the wider post-war settlement - a vital part of the Keynesian welfare state - as the theorists of post-Fordism do, because it confirms that it is not a free floating institution but part of the wider UK polity, set within the framework of a changing political economy. But the theoretical model they adopt makes it difficult to acknowledge the significance of the welfare state and the local state as part of a political settlement rather than one which simply flows from economic arrangements. Once the independent weight of politics is acknowledged, the form and implications of the break

up of the post-war settlement have to be looked at rather differently.

Viewed from this perspective, the settlement itself always looked rather less stable than anything labelled 'Fordism' might be expected to be - in the U.K., "it was a political contract built on an unsustainable economic basis, requiring the pursuit of impossible economic objectives" (Schwarz, 1987 p. 115). One of its key elements was the expansion of local government as part of the welfare state. It is in this context that it became common to refer to local - or urban - politics as the politics of social or collective consumption (Dunleavy 1980, Saunders 1984). Some of the ways in which local government was integrated uneasily into the welfare state through a series of overlapping policy networks are explored by Rhodes (1988), and the restructuring of local government in the 1980s can plausibly be explained as part of the wider break up of that state.

Some have argued that democratically elected local government reasonably open to pluralist pressures was a key element in the post war welfare state, and there is some evidence for this (Duncan and Goodwin 1982, p. 93, Saunders 1984). Dearlove argues that the reorganisation of the early 1970s took place to undermine working class and democratic access while improving it for business interests (Dearlove 1979, pp 104-5). But it

is not necessary to identify a 'golden' past which has been replaced by a less democratic present: to construct the past mainly in order to provide a contrast for the present. That simply reverses the implications of the post-Fordist model, which presents a negative image of the past and points to the possibilities of a more golden future.

Even sympathetic accounts confirm that post-war municipal labourism was associated with political and professional elitism as much as democratic involvement or pluralist openness (see, e.g., Goss 1988, Ch. 2, Gyford 1985, pp.6-10). And the extent of links between some council officers and members and sections of the business community, particularly those concerned with the construction industry and office development, is also well recorded (whether in the form of corruption associated with scandals like that around the Poulson case or in more subtle ways, see, e.g., Marriott 1967, particularly Chs 9 and 14, Dunleavy 1981). Dearlove successfully explores the concerns about working class involvement buried the coded language used in discussions of councillor and officer calibre in a series of official publications around the turn of the 1970s. But he is not so successful in providing positive evidence of the impact of working class politics at local level before 1974. It is unclear quite why the writers on

calibre were so worried (Dearlove 1979). The political differentiation of the 1970s and 1980s suggests that the reorganisation of local government made matters worse rather than better.

Despite lingering doubts about their interpretation of the past, however, the arguments of Dearlove and Saunders are more helpful in suggesting ways of analysing the present and suggesting possibilities for the future. One does not have to be convinced by the dual state model to acknowledge the increased significance of 'corporatist' modes of mediation at local level, particularly in the extent of representation of business interests, but possibly also in a decline of representation for traditional welfare state professionals (Saunders 1984, p.35). And, in retrospect, Dearlove seems remarkably prescient in identifying a concern about the lack of a formal relationship between "economic power, social status and the political control of local government," and the extent to which political power was "almost totally divorced from economic power" (Dearlove 1979, pp.104-105).

It is not difficult to see the period since the late 1970s as one in which the links between business and government have begun to be forged rather more effectively than in the past, as part of the process of moving

towards an 'enterprise state'. The language of welfare has been replaced by a language of growth, regeneration and public/private partnership, particularly in urban areas. At the same time the organisation of local welfare provision is also being extensively restructured to reflect new priorities. The direction of change is clear enough: if the post-war settlement was one which sought to incorporate the working class and its organisations, that of the 1980s, arising from the crisis of social democracy which characterised the 1970s, is one which starts from the needs of business and its organisations. At local level it implies the arrival (or possibly the return) of business as an active participant in the political process.

For most of the period since 1945 business people in the UK have been markedly reluctant to become involved with local government. Chambers of Commerce have been notoriously weak compared to their counterparts in continental Europe (where they have public law status), and have generally had little to say about most local government matters, except that planning rules were too tight, rates too high and that some sponsorship of overseas promotional trips might be helpful (see, e.g., Stewart, M. 1984). The increased involvement of business in the processes of local

government has been carefully constructed over the past decade, with help from central government, elected local governments and initiatives from the private sector. An early and rather modest expression of this can be seen in the requirement of local authorities to consult local businesses over rate levels and urban aid applications in the early 1980s, but the process has moved on apace since then (Grant 1987, p. 163).

Central government has increasingly encouraged business leaders to take positions within more 'civic' arenas. It has done so in a number of ways. In some cases, it has simply set up local organisations whose structures involve such 'leaders'. Urban development corporations have principally drawn on those concerned with property development as board members (particularly in the case of London Docklands), although representatives of other sectors have also been appointed. More recently the creation of Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) and Local Enterprise Companies (in Scotland), whose operation is largely to be delegated to business agencies, has taken the process further. The running of state funded training programmes is already the main source of income for many Chambers of Commerce. According to one report, "never before has government been willing to hand to employers the executive authority,

executive responsibility, and most importantly, the resources for public programmes. And never before have employers responded so rapidly and with such enthusiasm to the vision and the opportunity" (Bennett and Business in the Community 1990, p. 8).

But the process is not restricted to these specialist agencies. In education, business is now expected to make a far more extensive contribution to the development of syllabuses and provision within schools and further education. In higher education the privatisation of Polytechnics has brought higher salaries to senior management, and increased importance for business representation on boards of governors. There has been a marked blurring of the distinction between the public and the private, in terms of policy responsibility as much as service provision. This is, perhaps, clearest in the planning field, where there has been an endorsement of private sector led development planning, also helping to shape patterns of housing provision. Large scale proposals prepared by development consortia tend to be called in by the Secretary of State, thus avoiding detailed local scrutiny (see, e.g., the discussion of proposals for the development of 1500 acres in Swindon, Bassett et al 1990, pp. 54-55). The operation of the London Docklands Development Corporation seems to

lead in similar directions (see, e.g., the discussion of leverage planning in Brindley et al 1989, Ch. 6) and in more traditional new towns, such as Milton Keynes, development consortia also have significant influence, preparing plans for residential areas, within broad guidelines. The significance of such developments has been recognised within the planning profession, to the extent that some have argued for the new power relations to be given formal recognition. Lock, for example, suggests that effective planning in the South East will only be possible if regional planning agencies can be set up linking state, developers and other business interests (Lock 1989).

As well as the undoubtedly deliberate process of restructuring from above, initiatives from the private sector have also been endorsed by the centre. The Thatcher government was able to claim the expansion of enterprise agencies in the 1980s as a measure of the dynamism of the private sector and its commitment to the regeneration of Britain's urban economies. Business in the Community (BiC) has acted as a major focus for business involvement in the development of inner city policies and in wider involvement across a range of 'community' programmes (see, e.g., Fogarty and Christie 1990), and a more 'neutral' arena through which

collaboration between business and local government could be developed without a high level of political controversy. Jacobs notes the way in which BiC has tried to create new forms of business leadership in the process of urban economic regeneration, for example, through the formation of Business Leadership Teams (BLTs), involving senior local businessmen alongside representatives from local government, the trade unions, education and the voluntary sector (Jacobs 1990). Business in the Cities (a joint initiative organised by the CBI and BiC) has pointed to the need for business to take on a leadership role in urban areas, with BLTs and TECs interlocking to develop common strategies. It argues for business to develop a vision starting at community level, based around "co-ordination and partnership" with other local agencies: "The vision must be optimistic, yet practically anchored on the past legacy and a practical future...And, to retain community confidence, it must be achievable (Bennett and Business in the Community 1990, p. 12).

Here, too, new structures, new political forms, possibly even new state forms, are identified. The report argues that, "the division of responsibilities among stake-holders...requires a business plan. A city often needs a partnership to function as 'Board of Directors' to co-ordinate

its 'staff', 'line' and area activities, just as a business does. The local council cannot bear this responsibility alone" (Bennett and Business in the Community 1990, pp. 12-13). The nature of 'partnership' implies the need to set up an identifiable "executive power and agency" (p.23) separate from elected local governments. The language of business - the jargon of the new management - is used as a focus of policy development. Stress is placed on the need to develop 'mission' statements, and business plans, based on SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats/competition). The new teams are advised to aim for flagship projects, rather than integrated programmes like those which elected local government is expected to develop. They are exhorted to act like businesses (Bennett and Business in the Community 1990, pp. 26-29).

It is, perhaps, easy to dismiss these claims as exaggerated and, certainly, the hopes expressed in this document are just that. It remains unclear the extent to which active business involvement can be expected even in key areas. Many councils would still confirm the difficulties they have in involving business leaders in partnerships and joint ventures. And it is misleading to imagine that 'business' is a unified political force.

Reports such as these and other publications of BiC are as much about

constructing an atmosphere of legitimacy for business involvement (and consciousness of the demands of business) at local level as they are about actual involvement. But this does not mean that these arguments should simply be dismissed. They may be important in other ways, changing attitudes as much as structures. Moore and Richardson conclude convincingly that in the medium term the move towards partnership is more important for the way in which it encourages "changes in culture, ideas and the balance of political power between public and private sectors and between central and local government" than it is in achieving any economic benefits (Moore and Richardson 1989, p. 154).

Elected local government has not been pushed completely to one side by new organisations. On the contrary, most of the business initiatives have themselves explicitly sought to involve local councils, whether as a token of representation for the 'local community' or because it is, in effect, council officers who have played an initiating role. Even the Audit Commission has stressed the need to encourage active cooperation between local government and business in the process of economic development (Audit Commission 1989). There has been a substantial growth in partnership models rather than ones which imply the possibility

of purely private sector initiative. Local authorities have themselves played a major part in helping to create the hybrid organisations which draw business into key areas of local decision-making, offering finance, staff and other support (see, e.g., Moore and Richardson 1989).

Links to the European Community, too, have helped to encourage the growth of hybrid organisations. The European Commission has stressed the need for co-operation between different levels of government and business at regional level. It now allocates its main structural funds (apart from those related to agriculture) through Integrated Development Operations (IDOPs) which are regionally based (recent schemes in the UK were based in Strathclyde and Yorkshire and Humberside) and made up of representatives of central government departments, local governments and business. IDOPs not only effectively produce regional (and sub regional) plans, but are able to call on state resources for infrastructure and the provision of training in ways which suggest they can actively influence development, by encouraging co-ordinated operations within broad programmes (Lowe 1988, p.518, Preston and Hogg 1990).

The changes identified so far are in areas which have been marginal to local authority activity since 1945, and their increased salience in recent

years suggests new bases for urban politics. But the importance of business in policy-making at local level goes beyond direct involvement, which is strongest in the fields most directly relevant to business interests (such as economic development, education and training). It has substantially influenced the more traditional responsibilities of the local welfare state, too, confirming the move away from the local state as provider of collective consumption, to local state as defender of enterprise. Some traditional welfare concerns (for example inner city policy) have simply been reinterpreted as problems of economic growth, so that urban regeneration has been defined as business confidence and new construction. The business model has also (as in the late 1960s) been taken as appropriate for the organisation of other forms of local provision.

The importance of popular management texts has been widely noted (e.g. Stoker 1989 p.147 and Lowndes 1990). Although it may be dangerous to exaggerate the practical significance of the new management rhetoric, many key professionals seek legitimacy not from the electoral process, but from their ability to fit in with the latest management language, particularly reflected in the shift of usage (admittedly still tentative) from 'client' to 'consumer', as well as a new interest in marketing. Finance

professionals have been eager to take up the message of the Audit Commission with its stress on the 'competitive council' and a greater role for them (see, e.g., Clarke and Cochrane 1989), and some housing professionals have been keen to take up possibilities of running their agencies on business lines (see, e.g., Smith 1989, who also refers to the literature of the new management).

While business has become more directly involved as part of the U.K. local government system and has influenced management practices within it, restructuring has also taken place at lower levels of the hierarchy of the local welfare state. In particular there have been significant moves towards more decentralised delivery systems, and towards the encouragement of more direct involvement and participation by groups which in the past have largely been excluded from political influence. In a sense these changes may be seen as the other side of the coin of greater business involvement at local level. These initiatives have usually been analysed in terms of their stated aims of increasing democratic involvement in service delivery, and increasing the efficiency of service delivery (see, for example, Hoggett and Hambleton 1987).

But if they are considered as part of a wider process of political

restructuring, then their role may be rather more equivocal. They offer ways of integrating and better managing the troublesome classes left in the residual welfare state noted by Stoker, as well as the staff who manage them. It is accepted that these groups need to be given representation within the system, but their position within the hierarchy is clear. The key decisions about resources are taken elsewhere, by the strategists, the budget setters and the representatives of other interests. In a two-tier system, there may also be a two-tier corporatism. Many of the features of decentralisation policies within local government are familiar from earlier attempts at 'community development', encouraging incorporation rather than autonomous action (which were so heavily criticised by Cockburn 1977). The fragmentation of the local welfare state helps to confirm these shifts, moving decision-making into increasingly enclosed arenas, such as the joint committees bequeathed by the abolition of the metropolitan counties and the inter-agency bodies demanded by child protection work (see, e.g., DHSS 1988). In this context what looks like decentralisation may be closer to what Hudson and Plum (in another context) refer to as deconcentration, since in practice it is likely to give more power to those setting the rules centrally (Hudson and Plum 1986).

The supporters of the enabling authority and of post-Fordism tend to place stress on flexibility or fragmentation, with local government becoming one (perhaps the first) among many providers or becoming the regulator of a wider range of provision offered by others. In a sense each accepts the definition of local government as elected local government and seeks to find a key role for it in the new world of the 1990s. If we start from a broader definition of local government - closer to that of the local state - to include non-elected local governments and other sets of power relations, then the picture begins to change and it becomes possible to operate with a more complex picture of urban politics. In this context, too, it is still possible to acknowledge the significance of market mechanisms and of the 'enabling' authority, setting them within a wider context of change, as well as incorporating some of the insights offered by theories of post-Fordism.

It would be possible to conclude this survey of the changing nature of urban politics associated with them by pointing to the wide variety of possibilities open to local government in the 1990s. This is the conclusion drawn by Brindley et al (1989) who reject the possibility of characterising the new politics with any one overarching label - although one of them has

since suggested that post-Fordism might be appropriate (Stoker 1989, 1990). They are justified in highlighting the complexity of the processes of restructuring which are taking place and in confirming that they are not yet complete. But it is possible to go a little further, to attempt to identify directions of change, even if they are not yet fully developed. The overall context for local government and urban politics has begun to change, and some of the features of the new arrangements are becoming clearer.

Tentative conclusions can be drawn which point towards corporatist structures set within the broader framework of a capitalist political economy - with the functional representation of different groups at local level through a variety of organisations, including, but not exclusively, elected local governments⁷. Elected local governments may continue to play an active role as mediators between different interests, managing those otherwise excluded, but more clearly than ever will do so in an overall context which acknowledges the role of business. It is also likely to have to share that role with other state bodies, which may (following Stoker) be characterised as non elected local government. Proposals for the shift of some existing responsibilities (e.g. police, education and child

protection) to specialist agencies, in the context of moves towards unitary authorities, are likely to reinforce this, by undermining the centrality of elected local governments. Local politics in the 1990s will increasingly need to be analysed in terms which acknowledge a new set of power relations, reflected in an increased emphasis on public/private partnership: which partner is dominant in particular cases may still be an open question, but that will be the question which matters.

6.4 Conclusion

Four main features provided the context for initiative at local level in the early 1980s. First, a set of continuing and changing legal constraints which limited scope for manoeuvre, but did not necessarily remove it all together. The rules of the game kept changing, but they were defined by local as well as central government, and some of the more important aspects might flow from professional structures as much as straightforward legal limitations. Secondly, local government was under severe and increasing financial pressures in this period, generally imposed from above. Again, however, it was not the case that local government

spending was determined from above. On the contrary significant scope for variation remained, and the battle over spending levels continued through the decade and into the 1990s. Thirdly, the political context at the start of the 1980s encouraged a widespread search for political alternatives on the left of the Labour Party, and local government was a crucial site for attempts to develop these, both in emphasising the importance of local (decentralised) initiatives and in providing examples suitable for further development at national level under a (hoped for) Labour government. Finally, the changes taking place within particular local authorities need to be understood in the context of wider processes of restructuring, beginning to encourage a more active role for business.

Assessing the extent to which it was possible to develop local socialist initiatives in this period, particularly in the development of local economic policies, offers one way of judging the meaning of local autonomy across a number of key axes, including the ability of councils to act independently of the centre; their ability to make decisions independently of the pressures of capitalist development at local level; and the extent to which they can escape from the influence of professional power at local level and through policy networks (see, e.g., Gurr and King

1987, pp. 43-73 and Goldsmith 1990, pp. 48-9). The next chapter looks more closely at the policy area of locally authority economic development whose growth in the 1980s owed little to the priorities of central government, but may have been more in line with pressures from locally (and nationally) based economic interest groups.

Notes

1. Much of the discussion on local socialism draws on material previously published in Cochrane, A. (1988) *Municipal Socialism in the 1980s*. Open University, pp. 47-49.
2. Later in the decade, Liverpool, too, attracted the label, and certainly the councils leaders played an important part in developing carrying out the strategy adopted by the 'left' councils over rate capping. But Liverpool has not been included in this list because the council leadership's orientation (influenced by the 'Militant' group within the Labour Party) was fundamentally towards the national stage and it explicitly rejected the possibility of taking substantial independent initiative at local level (except perhaps in housing). See Hatton 1988 Chs 5-8, Parkinson 1985, Taaffe and Mulhearn 1988, Chs 6-13.

3. The implications of political mobilisation could be contradictory: one aspect was the desire to mobilise communities in favour of some existing programme which the left wanted to see implemented (such as anti-racism, anti-sexism or support for gay and lesbian organisations); whilst another was oriented towards the empowerment of local communities. Sometimes the commitment to one made the other unachievable, as councils seemed to act as moral and political consciences to the people they represented. Campbell quotes one gay councillor in a London borough who argues that "what we've got to worry about is how to help people convince themselves. We can't guilt trip people any more" and criticises those among the local socialists who have taken a different path, attempting to use state power to impose change without having won wide support for it: "where administrative methods are used in the name of a new politics; the problem arises where administrations use the power of the town hall to short-circuit the toil of creating a new consciousness" (Campbell 1987, p.13). Similar concerns arise in Gyford's argument that here is a danger of encouraging the development of a new preceptorialism in which the 'correct' line is fed into the community by activists and the council machine (Gyford 1985, pp. 87-8).

4. The material in sections 6.2 and 6.3 draws extensively on and develops an already published article by me: Cochrane 1991 in references.
5. Some authors, including Hoggett and Lipietz, use the term neo-Fordism in preference to post-Fordism. Lipietz refers to a potential neo-Fordism to indicate that the crisis of Fordism is not yet resolved. In this chapter the term post-Fordism is used deliberately because most of the arguments under discussion (including those of Hoggett) seem to proceed from an assumption that a fundamentally new set of arrangements is being introduced.
6. Jessop neatly summarises the underlying argument of the regulationists as follows: "They asked how capitalism could survive even though the capital relation itself inevitably generated antagonisms and crises which made continuing accumulation improbable. They found an answer in specific institutional forms, societal norms, and patterns of strategic conduct which both expressed and regulated these conflicts until the inevitable tensions and divergencies among these various regulatory forms reached crisis point" (Jessop 1988, p.149).
7. Dunleavy and O'Leary use neo-pluralism to describe arrangements which are similar, but the interaction of state and functional interests, with a

continuing (independent) role for the state suggests that corporatism is a more appropriate term (Dunleavy and O'Leary 1987, Ch 5).

Chapter 7. Developing new local economic policies

7.1 Economic policies and local government

Although local authorities had no specific powers to undertake initiatives in the area of economic development there was a general and significant expansion of such activity in the 1980s¹ (see, for example, Martinos 1988, Chandler and Lawless 1985, Mills and Young 1986 and Morison 1987). This is one of the features which makes local economic policy such an important topic in the context of our study. Its growth was neither intended nor encouraged by central government, which suggests that councils still had significant scope for developing independent initiative at local level, and also makes it possible to consider the nature of relationships between councils and local businesses (in particular, the extent to which councils can develop policies independently of pressures from them). At the same time as central government was stressing the need for a change of direction at national level, away from forms of state intervention, at local level the argument for the state to become involved in influencing the economy was becoming more widely accepted. There was also a contrast between the explicit rejection of geographically based

(regional) policies by national government and the espousal of spatially specific policies at local level. As the 1980s progressed this contrast became less sharp as central governments became more involved in developing of new policies for urban areas (enterprise zones and development corporations) but - at first at least - these were intended to operate as models (of free market initiative) of wider relevance for the UK economy as a whole than as spatially based initiatives (see, e.g., Anderson 1983 and 1990). By the mid 1980s it was local councils which had taken the lead in the development of spatially oriented industrial policies which were usually justified in terms of the specific problems faced they faced, in implicit recognition of the processes of uneven development which affected different regions and urban areas differently in the period of deindustrialisation which characterised the 1980s (see, e.g., Massey 1988, Martin 1988). Urban unemployment was recognised as a particular problem and urban authorities took the lead in seeking to develop policies aimed at reducing levels of unemployment (Hasluck 1987).

In England and Wales by the mid 1980s spending on local economic development rivalled the level of central government spending on regional policy and most councils had officers and units responsible for the activity (Mills and Young 1986, Martinos 1988 and Sellgren 1987). By this time,

according to Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) estimates, over £250m was being spent annually out of revenue budgets on economic development and promotion by local authorities in England and Wales and their capital spending was around £150m p.a.. In Scotland, too, councils were playing an increasingly active role, working alongside the semi-autonomous development agencies which had been set up from the centre taking their own initiatives (see, e.g, Moore and Booth 1986b, Donnison and Middleton 1987 and Keating 1988 particularly on relations between local authorities and the Scottish Development Agency in developing policies for urban regeneration in Glasgow). And even in Northern Ireland, where budgets were much lower, new initiatives were being developed (see, e.g., O'Dowd et al 1989).

Most official estimates also almost certainly substantially underrepresent actual spending on economic development, since some is buried under other (mainstream) budget heads in the accounts of many councils. It may, for example be justified as part of the management of corporate estates or the refurbishment of inner cities, as well as arising from the implementation of planning policies, which sometimes require the relocation of non-conforming industries from residential areas. The financial rules imposed by the centre did not encourage councils to

separately identify economic development as a substantial area of activity, on the contrary encouraging them to spread it between budgets to avoid the limitations implied by their use of Section 137 of the 1972 Local Government Act, under which only a relatively small amount could be spent on activities not otherwise identified as statutorily required or permitted.

There has, of course, been a long tradition of local authority economic policy-making, particularly in the older industrial regions whose politics have been dominated by the Labour Party, and where Gyford's 'municipal labourism' was at its strongest in the 1950s and 1960s. This economic policy often combined broad visions of regional and local change, with a detailed practice centred on the provision of land and premises to firms and developers as well as promotional activity to attract potential employers from elsewhere (for the early history of local economic development initiatives, see, e.g., Buck 1981 and Ward 1984a). In the 1930s individual councils in the North-East (such as Jarrow) took the lead in seeking additional private act powers for economic development and initially successful attempts were made to extend these to the whole of the Tyne and Wear County Council area in the 1970s, although they were withdrawn in the early 1980s (Camina 1974, Rogers and Smith 1977). During the 'long boom' after 1945 councils in the North - and particularly

the North-East - of England were in the forefront of attempts to change their image, to construct a new infrastructure, to produce a region of the twentieth century (see, e.g, Hudson 1990, Massey 1984, p.203). A whole new world was to be created which could challenge the dominance of London, with the help of new towns, industrial estates, ring roads, motorways, city centre redevelopment and the provision of other urban infrastructure.

But there was always a sharp contrast between the scale of the ambitions and the nature of the policy instruments utilised by local authorities. Until the 1970s the dominant forms of local authority economic development activity (described as 'traditional' by Cochrane 1983 and 'mainstream' by Boddy 1984) were the provision of land and premises to developers and businesses, and of related information about the availability of land and premises in the private sector, coupled with extensive promotional campaigns to attract industry from elsewhere. In a few cases small amounts of financial assistance were offered, usually in the form of grants, sometimes loans and mortgages. Close relationships often existed between property agencies and industrial development officers. At local level small firms were the main targets for assistance and success was measured in terms of factory units constructed and

enquiries from potential customers. Little serious attention was paid to the numbers or nature of jobs created.

Industrial development officers were frequently employed as 'experts' who understood and, in a sense, were expected to act as representatives of the private sector in a way that orthodox local government officers could not (for discussions of this period, see Boddy 1982, Johnson and Cochrane 1981, particularly Ch. 3). Although they have begun to carve out their own professional niche (with the formation of their own professional association) industrial development officers tended to be externally oriented, rather than a natural part of the local government bureaucracy. Their principal orientation was towards two groups outside the council - a potential 'client' group which consisted of private sector employers and major developers and a 'peer' group made up of commercial estate agents and local businesses (Johnson and Cochrane 1981 pp.93-94). The practice of the traditional councils and their industrial development officers could best be described as 'opportunistic', rather than planned, in the sense that their skills lay in identifying and responding to the needs of their 'clients', putting together the best possible packages to make particular sites attractive to the commercial or industrial concerns at which they were aiming.

Over the period since 1975, the **general** expansion of local economic development activity can be missed if one focuses on a few key innovators in the field. Yet one of the clearest trends right through the late 1970s and 1980s has been the continued growth in importance of industrial development officers, following relatively mainstream policies. It is this which is expressed in surveys, such as those undertaken by Mills and Young 1986 and Sellgren 1987 (see also Chandler and Lawless 1985, Part II, which charts the continued development of this policy area in the early 1980s). Such has been the growth of their significance, within local government that in the late 1980s the Local Government Training Board was considering whether specific professional training programmes were required (Local Government Training Board 1986). The expansion of activity in the late 1970s in response to rising unemployment was not at first accompanied by any change in policy direction. The consensual aims seemed to be the maximisation of local employment or securing a stable and expanding industrial base. And a great deal of academic and policy research has focused on a concern to assess the effectiveness of local economic policies which sometimes leads to attempts to identify 'best practice' suitable for replication elsewhere. A significant proportion of work produced within this framework results in a careful description of

practice as much as any serious attempt at evaluation. (See Bovaird et al 1988, for a discussion of some of the difficulties of assessing effectiveness; evaluations of particular initiatives include Armstrong 1988, Robinson and Wren 1987, Davies et al 1986; numerous case studies of individual councils have been produced, including a series prepared by the Centre of Urban and Regional Studies at the University of Birmingham for the West Midlands County Council in the early 1980s; other examples of broad surveys include Boddy 1982, Campbell 1990, Chandler and Lawless 1985, Coulson 1986, Johnson and Cochrane 1981, Mills and Young 1986, Sellgren 1987; a number of publications have gone beyond this to argue strongly for the development of local economic initiatives, including Cambell et al 1987 and 1988, and Local Government Training Board 1986; organisations such as the Centre for Local Economic Strategies have sponsored research to promote initiatives of this sort, LEDIS manages an extensive database of local economic initiatives and the journal 'Local Economy' is also committed to encouraging their development).

Blunkett and Jackson note that at the start of the 1980s local councils "were adapting the traditional economic role of British local government which offered inducements in the form of grants, free loans, and publicly subsidised infrastructure, and no request for reciprocal

involvement with the community, in order to attract industrial and commercial concerns which were looking for suitable sites for investment and trading" (Blunkett and Jackson, K. 1987 p.110). Even in the authorities later identified with the left, therefore, the initial move was towards more of the same, although there were already increasing signs that different policies were being taken up in some places.

7.2 The new policies

One factor encouraging the growth of new approaches to economic policy seems to have been the widespread impact of the slump and economic restructuring beyond the traditional regions. The West Midlands went from being a prosperous region to one with levels of unemployment far above the national average; the inner city areas of London and its western manufacturing belt were also hit hard; and Sheffield which had done much better than the national average because of its base in special steels and engineering in the 1970s, suddenly faced collapse in the early 1980s. In general, it is hardly surprising that change was slower in the more traditional 'distressed areas', where the attachment of the Labour hierarchies to the regional deals of the past was deeper. The emphasis of

lobbying had been on gaining bigger slices of regional policies, often in alliance with major national and multinational firms. Councils had been part of a regionalist consensus and of the economic welfarism it represented (Massey 1984 Ch. 4, Beynon et al 1989). The immediate response to the undermining of the base for that consensus was likely to be an attempt to reconstruct it. The arrival of economic slump was not a new experience - not a shock - in the same way as it was in some of the other areas, nor was there a political shock in the form of changing political control. The methods of the past were largely continued by the politicians of the past.

But the development of new economic policies at local level was a key feature of the approach adopted by many of the most active local socialist authorities in the early 1980s and was intended to provide an alternative not only to the policies being developed by the Thatcher government, but also to the policies of Labour in power in the 1970s and to the 'mainstream' policies which dominated in local government. The best known of the authorities which took up local economic initiatives as a central part of a wider socialist strategy were the GLC, Sheffield and the West Midlands County Council, although they were also included as elements in the programmes of other left councils at the start of the

1980s (including some London Boroughs) and were seen (or accepted) as symbols of socialist intent for a number of other councils which were less wholeheartedly committed to wider local socialist initiatives (such as Leeds, West Yorkshire and Lancashire County Council). Discussions of the new initiatives which contrast them with other approaches are to be found in Benington 1986, Blazyca 1983, Boddy 1984, Cochrane 1986, Green, G. 1987, Mawson and Miller 1986, Mole and Elliott 1986 and Moore and Booth 1986a. More critical discussion takes place in Cochrane 1983, 1987a and 1988, Duncan and Goodwin 1985a and b, Eisenschitz and North 1986, Geddes 1988, Gough 1986, Nolan and O'Donnell 1987 and Totterdill 1989. Interesting debates have also been generated from among those politicians and officers directly involved with the left initiatives, reflected, for example, in Alcock et al 1984, Blunkett and Jackson, K. 1987, Critical Social Policy 1983, Gunnell 1990, Mackintosh and Wainwright 1987, Murray 1984 and 1987, as well as in the publications of some of the councils involved, particularly GLC 1983, 1985, 1986 a and b, but also some of the jobs plans produced in the run up to the 1987 General Election such as London Borough of Southwark 1986, and City of Sheffield 1987.

The range of different approaches reflected in the policies adopted by different left councils makes it difficult to come up with a comprehensive

listing of all those adopted and the rationales behind them. It is possible to run through a series of new initiatives which were developed by the interventionist authorities in the early 1980s, and some of these are listed, for example, in Mawson and Miller 1986, Cochrane 1986b, Campbell et al 1987b, Marks 1987 and Totterdill 1989. The initiatives included the setting up of autonomous local enterprise boards which were able to invest directly in the private sector, and to collaborate with the private financial institutions in raising funds for investment; an increased commitment to co-operative style enterprise and other forms of social ownership and democratic control by employees; assistance to ethnic minority businesses and a greater sympathy for equal opportunity issues, for example through the use of contract compliance; the sponsorship of research on local economies and particular economic sectors to make it possible to develop some overall strategic view; a move away from giving grants to small businesses without a degree of control and feedback - in the case of enterprise boards the need for some financial return; an interest in the possibilities of product development and of technology transfer, from research to workplace; a broad definition of economic activity to include, for example, cultural initiatives and the employment and training (sometimes redefined as labour market) policies of the authority; a

commitment to the maintenance and development of municipal employment and municipal enterprise. These initiatives were to be handled through specialist officers, often expected to be politically sympathetic and usually organised in specialist units of one sort or another, with the overall aim of influencing decision making in the private sector (through various forms of what came to be called 'leverage').

But, listing the activities in this way may be misleading for three main reasons. First, no such list can be comprehensive so it will not include every relevant activity yet, secondly, producing a list may also imply that all the authorities engaged in all the activities listed when in practice different approaches were adopted in different places. Thirdly, many councils not identified with the new initiatives - whether labelled as 'local socialists' (Gyford 1985) or 'interventionists' (Mawson and Miller 1986) - can justifiably claim to have been undertaking similar activities.

It is possible, however, to identify some features which influenced the attempts to develop new initiatives and which served to set a policy context, within which local politicians, officers and activists operated. The first key element represented a significant move away from the policies of the past, since it sought to integrate measures of job creation with policies which sought to meet social needs (and frequently to extend

democratic control over production). The old implicit, and sometimes explicit, division between economic and social policies was under challenge. Secondly, it was argued that councils should have the right (and sometimes the responsibility) to influence decision-making within the private sector to achieve these ends (whether through targeted investment, negotiation over particular developments or through its ordering practices). Above all, it was argued that the policies and priorities of the City of London and its financial institutions tended to discourage investment in manufacturing industry, in the older regions and in the inner cities, so that local government could encourage investment in (and possibly help to channel investment to) these areas (see Minns 1982, Ch. 4). And thirdly, it was suggested that local government should be able to show others best practice in its own operation (e.g. through equal opportunities policies), and should expand and defend municipal services to meet social need, as well as restructuring them to reflect community pressures more accurately. In general local initiatives were to show how socialist initiatives might be developed at national level, but the continued importance of the local level even within a sympathetic national framework was also frequently stressed. Centralised models of planning were explicitly rejected².

Murray, for example, draws conclusions from the experience of the GLC and GLEB, to argue for detailed surgical intervention in the process of production and distribution, to encourage the development of wider industrial strategies (Murray 1984, 1987). Although he does not develop the argument here, he points towards a different form of local government, which requires more autonomy, within a national and regional system of planning, able to escape from existing bureaucratic structures. Mackintosh and Wainwright (1987), survey a number of areas of the GLC's economic policy, and although the book's conclusions are not always clear cut, in part perhaps because there is not full agreement among its various authors, it is possible to identify arguments within it which suggest that the internal bargaining and negotiating processes of the local state have an important part to play in determining outcomes, and may, even, be of more importance than any stated aims and ambitions. The process of implementation is acknowledged to be a vital part of the political process, and one which is often ignored in more traditional analysis of policy-making. The chapters which focus on public transport, internal working practices and intervention into the furniture industry suggest that decisions by politicians are not enough, if there are not also active political campaigns at other levels of the system, inside and outside the

council.

Some of the policy developments in the early 1980s suggested a key role for local authorities in influencing the process of economic restructuring through intervention in the process of production itself. This was probably put at its strongest in the arguments of the Greater London Council (GLC). In one publication it was argued that, "Profit is no longer an accurate guide to the way out of economic crisis. It is like a compass which has lost its bearings and points in the opposite direction to the way in which we need to go" (GLC 1983, p.17). It was suggested that changing economic structures made it possible for councils to intervene on the side of labour in the process of restructuring which was taking place. Drawing on analogies from the retail sector it was said to be possible to identify strategic points of intervention. Just as major retailers such as Marks and Spencer, Benetton and Next could place conditions on suppliers, so local authorities (or enterprise boards) should be able to place conditions on firms they assisted, or firms which supplied them. The aim was to shift the balance of forces between capital and labour and encourage change which not only generated and protected jobs, but would also open employment to previously excluded or disadvantaged groups, and encourage democratic planning within enterprises and in ways which involved the

wider community (see also GLC 1985, Introduction, Murray 1987).

The GLC's approach was controversial, arousing criticism not only from the predictably hostile Conservative government, but also within the Labour Party and from other councils trying to develop their own economic policies. But its experience also illustrated in a very sharp form the way in which local authority economic policies became **politically** important, and thus impossible to reduce solely to technical and professional questions, even if the need for the economic and financial viability of projects was always stressed. The range of publications produced by the GLC (including its massive strategy documents, GLC 1985, 1986 a and b) far exceeds those produced by other councils and local agencies, but they were part of a more general move towards the publication of economic policy documents by a range of authorities - including, for example, the various local jobs plans prepared in 1987, discussed and summarised by Campbell et al (1987a and b).

In retrospect it is easy to feel that the heat of the debate generated by these initiatives may have been exaggerated, since many of the methods initially associated with the rise of 'local socialism' (Gyford 1985, Boddy and Fudge 1984) or a 'new municipal socialism' (Cochrane 1986a and 1988) have now been taken up more widely by councils with quite different

political ambitions. As Chandler and Lawless comment, "Although left wing authorities undertake a number of distinctive employment creation policies which imply a critical view of the prevailing economic system they also carry out, and in several cases have initiated, strategies that are widely adopted by more conservative councils" (Chandler and Lawless 1985, p. 258). It may be that the more neutral terms 'interventionist' (which is used by Miller and Mawson, 1986) or 'radical-interventionist' (used by Martinos, 1988) are more appropriate because they make no claims to link quite disparate political initiatives into a single movement (or 'syndrome' to use Gyford's term).

Chandler and Lawless go so far as to suggest that the **practice** of the left authorities has tended to be, "like Gaitskell and Crosland rejecting Clause IV in favour of the Swedish approach of controlling private capital through redistributive taxation and close regulation of capital investment and working conditions" (Chandler and Lawless 1985, p. 260). But this conclusion is a superficial one, which fails to take into account the radical nature of many of the new initiatives and - above all - the arguments which underlay them. It implies a simple contrast between the policies of nationalisation, identified with the traditional left, and those which look for other methods of control, identified with the Labour Party right. But

these were not the alternatives for the supporters of socialist local economic strategies. On the contrary, they rejected existing forms of nationalisation as bureaucratic, undemocratic, hierarchical and , essentially, part of the dominant economic organisation of British capitalism. This is reflected in a wide range of material, including Blunkett and Green, for example, who argue for structures which develop "the innovatory process of building from the bottom" (Blunkett and Green 1983 p. 7). Blazyca also offers a fierce critique of centralised planning and the practice of nationalisation in the UK since 1945, before going on to explore some of the local alternatives (Blazyca 1983 Chs 3 and 5) (see also Mackintosh and Wainwright 1987 and Murray 1987). What was required, they argued was a more decentralised and more democratic process of economic planning. This is clear from the way in which the GLC discussed the development of its industrial strategy:

"A plan implied a blueprint, drawn up from above. The London economy was too complex, the powers of the GLC too limited... Strategy on the other hand was a concept with military rather than architectural origins, meaning literally the choice of ground on which to conflict, with limited resources and a ground level perspective which was always having to guess at what was over the horizon.

What it implied was a view of the London economy as composed of innumerable battle grounds, involving a struggle for jobs against the pressures of the market, of

particular employers and in some cases the direct opposition of the government itself. Each case was fought over a particular terrain, with its specific balance of forces... Each case required its own strategy, geared at first to the immediate terrain, but then broadening out to the developing contours and prospects of the industry as a whole...

In each case the strategy for any one plant always involves wider questions and suggests wider links..." (GLC 1985, pp2/3).

This is certainly not the language of Gaitskell and Crosland. On the contrary, instead of stressing the importance of macroeconomic economic management and policies of regulation, it implies a direct intervention and involvement at the level of individual enterprises ('enterprise planning' in the early language of the GLC and GLEB, see, e.g. GLEB 1983a and b, and 1985a). Nor is it just the language which was different. The London Industrial Strategy (GLC 1985) catalogues a number of interventions which confirm that activist intent was translated into practice, and further case studies are to be found in Mackintosh and Wainwright 1987. Nor was the GLC unique in this. A range of related (if not identical) initiatives can be identified across the country (see, e.g. Campbell et al 1987a and b, Cochrane 1988, Marks 1987, Mawson and Miller 1986 for surveys).

Whilst a degree of caution is advisable in assessing the impact of the left's economic initiatives, it would be equally misleading to ignore the importance of debates about 'local socialism' for some of the policies

which were developed at this time. The wider ambitions of councils such as the Greater London Council and Sheffield in the first half of the 1980s must be acknowledged, not only because they have influenced contemporary development, but also because the policies which flowed from them did suggest a more radical alternative than any others which were on offer at national or local level. By the end of the decade, there is evidence that the local experiments were being taken up and developed in ways which dulled their radical edge, for example as summarised for Labour Party consumption in Gilhespy et al, 1986 pp. 55-68, and in the arguments of Hirst and Zeitlin 1989, Ch. 1 or the programme for a national technology policy outlined by Blackburn and Sharpe 1988, but the interpretation remains a matter of political contention (reflected in the alternative views expressed by Mackintosh and Wainwright 1987 and Murray 1987, for example). The ambiguity of the formulations of the early 1980s and the politics which lay behind them is an important element in understanding the ways in which the local authority left's economic policies developed through the 1980s³.

Even if one accepts that some radical claims may need to be reassessed the comparison with Gaitskell and Crosland is highly inappropriate, since whatever conclusions are drawn from the local

authority experience, they point directly towards proposals for the development of an industrial policy some distance away from the arguments of the 1950s, when the stress was on welfare and 'social equality' (Crosland 1956, Ch. 8). Even in his later speeches, Crosland tended to stress the role of macroeconomic policy and incomes policy and to underplay the value (although not discount the possibility) of direct intervention, since he argued that neither politicians nor civil servants were well equipped for the task (Crosland 1974, p. 252). Maybe he would have been persuaded by the arguments of the GLC, but their approach owed little to him.

In some ways the differences between the interventionist or radical authorities were almost as important as the similarities between them. Among the local enterprise boards, for example, the Greater London Enterprise Board attracted the greatest media attention and through its links to the GLC's industrial strategy was probably also the most radical. Its system of enterprise planning was intended to bring together workers, employers and state in restructuring production for labour, rather than capital. Its ambitions were the most extensive (as expressed not only in the GLC's publications, including GLC 1985, 1986 a and b, but also in its own, including GLEB 1985b and 1986), aiming for the production of socially

useful products, more democratic decision-making within enterprises, and the extension of equal opportunities, both in terms of employment and grades of employment. In the West Midlands, by contrast, more stress was placed on an industrial strategy which directed resources towards industrial sectors and enterprises which were often dismissed by more traditional financial institutions, particularly those based in the City of London, including middle-sized firms and those in the manufacturing sector. The West Midlands strategy looked more like a local version of national industrial strategy which had been promised in Labour's 1973 programme. Similar issues were raised by Lancashire Enterprises and West Yorkshire Enterprise Board but they stressed their closeness to the private sector right from the start - LEL presented itself as a regional development agency and WYEB as a regionally based (and at first, at least, publicly supported) merchant bank (see Cochrane and Clarke, 1990, for a more extensive survey of the enterprise board experience. See also Clarke and Cochrane 1987 and Cochrane 1988).

Running through the differences and similarities and trying to weigh them against each other is, however, ultimately likely to be a fruitless task. These initiatives can instead more usefully be seen as part of a more general set of changes and pressures at local level, particularly among a

relatively small group of councils associated with the local authority left. They all suggest a more active role for local government, which finds a different expression in the different authorities. They suggest a more strategic and independent, less 'opportunistic', starting point than those of 'mainstream' approaches. They place more emphasis on the possibility of generating growth from indigenous industry and initiative. More important, they are claiming - or perhaps reclaiming - economic policy as a justified sphere of activity for local government, not simply in the sense that councils are providers of necessary infrastructure, land and premises (although they continue to perform that role) but in the sense that they have an interest in shaping and managing processes of economic change. In practice, what can be achieved at local level may not always be dramatically different, but the initiatives of the early 1980s open up the possibility of discussion and debate around restructuring, which is lost in the more detailed bargaining of industrial development officers with their 'clients'.

The high tide of the left's local authority economic strategies began to recede in the mid 1980s, with the abolition of the GLC and the metropolitan county councils in 1986 and the defeat of the campaigns against rate-capping in 1985-6. The enterprise boards were left to survive

in a much more hostile environment and with little hope of continued significant financial support from local authorities. They were forced to find new ways of surviving which encouraged an increasing redefinition of policy objectives, moving towards a more acceptable role as regionally based investment banks or development agencies. Increasingly the pursuit of 'social' objectives came to rely on subsidy from other government agencies, usually local government. Similar pressures affected other authorities which had not followed the enterprise board route, as they had to adjust to increasingly limited budgets, and, perhaps more important, a retreat from perspectives which suggested that councils could effectively challenge central government and capitalism at local level (see Lansley et al 1989 Chs 10 and 11).

7.3 The legacy of the 1980s

At the end of the 1980s, it is possible to look back rather more dispassionately and identify general trends instead of concentrating on ideological differences. Totterdill stresses the need to place the new initiatives in their wider institutional and policy context, noting that they did not represent as great a break with the past as was sometimes

suggested at the time. More important, perhaps, he notes that "much of the promise of the manifestos published during the early eighties was underwritten by the assumption of an early General Election victory for the Labour Party. Without this victory, the new wave of interventionist initiatives may gradually become assimilated within the mainstream of traditional local authority policy. Interventionist strategy could become subsumed within the more traditional activities of fragmented project management and a subservient relationship with the private sector" (Totterdill 1989, p. 479).

More positively, in retrospect, and building on the arguments developed in Chapter 6, the local authority left's initiatives can be seen as ways of setting up new forms of negotiation, bargaining and 'partnership' with the private sector. This was always clearest with the enterprise boards, at least outside London. All of them stressed their commitment to joint activity with private sector financial institutions, whether - as was the case with WYEB (now Yorkshire Enterprise) - through borrowing or - as in the case of the West Midlands - through joint schemes and investment in regional funds. The stress on 'leverage' ratios, that is the proportion of private sector finance attracted for every pound of enterprise board finance, which was made by all the boards (including GLEB) shows the

importance attached to such collaboration (see Cochrane 1987a,1988). The Local Government and Housing Act 1989 will make it difficult for councils to benefit from the enterprise board model or any shareholding in firms in the private sector, but even before this legislation was introduced, the enterprise boards were already moving away from local government control and towards greater independence, partly because in most cases their parent authorities (the GLC and the metropolitan counties) were abolished in 1986. Greater London Enterprise (as GLEB was renamed) has moved away from local authority control, Yorkshire Enterprise is largely independent and self-financing, and in another case there has been a management buy out.

These changes could be interpreted as a defeat for the high hopes of the early 1980s, and perhaps they are. But they also suggest an integration of some of the policies of the boards into the financial mainstream, for example in terms of the creation of financial institutions oriented towards previously unfashionable areas, at least as far as the City of London has been concerned. The degree of 'partnership' running through the boards is crucial in other ways, too, because it suggests the need to generate a more institutionalised and formal set of relations with key agencies in the private sector. GLEB's initial approach to enterprise planning with its

stress on supporting the workers in enterprises may have made it difficult to achieve the partnerships it was looking for between state, employers and workers - Cawson's 'micro-corporatism' - but all the boards have been involved in more modest moves towards 'partnership' in a range of schemes, and this has generally been defined more modestly in terms of 'partnership' with the private sector (see Cochrane and Clarke 1990).

The new initiatives developed in local government have done so alongside another process of change, which has been supported by central government. One aspect of this change, discussed in the previous chapter, has been a move towards greater involvement by some firms in wider issues of urban economic development, reflected, for example, in the growth of Business in the Community. Although Business in the Community was a private sector initiative (see Pelling 1984) and although the enterprise agency movement has been supported and encouraged by central government, the commitment of local authorities of both 'left' and 'right' to the development of 'partnerships' has been crucially important for their expansion. All the enterprise boards are members of Business in the Community, and most councils are actively involved with their local enterprise agencies. There has been a dramatic growth of 'partnership' at local level, whether interpreted as an attempt by local government to

influence the private sector or as a take over of local government institutions by the private sector (see Moore 1990, Harding 1990a and b).

In this sense the most significant changes in the field of local economic development have been those of attitude and involvement. Instead of the relatively passive and potentially responsive role, which was reflected in strategies which focused on the marketing of land and premises, there has been a shift towards closer and more consistent links between business and local authorities. Many of the activities have remained the same and expanded, but the context of policy-making has begun to change, and there has been a growth of various types of agency intended to make those links more effective reflected in the growth of non elected local state agencies - more or less autonomous bodies including enterprise boards, economic development companies, enterprise agencies, training and enterprise councils and even urban development corporations - which may provide opportunities for private sector agencies to influence, and even direct, the process of public policymaking (see also Stoker 1988, Ch. 3).

Although many of these initiatives may have been encouraged by the Conservative governments of the 1980s in the hope that local employers will take the lead in decision-making within them (in particular the

Training and Enterprise Councils, see e.g., Peck and Emmerich 1990 and 1991, Peck and Shutt 1990), it has also been argued that similar forms might also be used to increase the possibility of councils influencing the operation of the market and mobilising additional financial support. This is an ambition which underpinned many of the initial arguments for the setting up of enterprise boards and justifies the involvement of many councils in enterprise agencies. Moore argues strongly that the enterprise agency model offers scope for councils to influence the process of economic development, rather than being a Trojan horse through which business can influence local government, and this certainly seems to be the interpretation favoured by most councils (Moore 1988).

Traditionally economic development work, as an identifiable policy area within local government, has concentrated on a relatively narrow range of activities, perhaps better expressed in the term 'industrial development'. The orientation has been towards the expansion and attraction of firms and investment. In many ways, this has been just as true of the more recent (and 'radical') approaches as it has of the older ones. Most of the activities referred to so far can loosely be placed under the heading of 'industrial' policy. They are concerned to support and sustain existing industry, identify and attempt to overcome weaknesses, and,

possibly to encourage development in new areas to replace the decline of traditional employment. Although they can be seen as extensions of past policies, however, their extent and nature begins to hint at more substantial change. Claims are beginning to be made for local authority contributions to restructuring their local economies which go beyond the ambition of property related activities and attracting a bit more high technology industry than their neighbours. It is in this sense that it becomes possible to identify, in embryonic terms at least, some wider commitment to the development of local economic strategies.

The move towards a redefined and more strategic view of economic development in some local authorities is also expressed in an increased interest in labour market policy. Instead of focusing attention on activities which may be productive in terms of new factory units or additional local investment, they have begun to approach the problem from a different angle. There has been a growing concern about the nature of jobs in the local labour market and about access to them. Many councils now have officers responsible for encouraging the growth of ethnic minority businesses and, in some cases, there is a specific interest in encouraging the growth of women's employment. It has even been suggested that the only form of economic intervention which can be successful at

local level lies in attempting to influence the labour market (Lovering 1988, pp 153-156). Policies which may be relevant here, for example, include the targetting of specialist training in areas where there are skill shortages and, if equal opportunities is one aim of policy, then various forms of positive discrimination could direct resources towards disadvantaged groups. Attempts have also been made through the process of contract compliance to ensure that those who supply goods to councils will agree to improve their own employment practices. Although this process has been made more difficult as a result of central government legislation, there is some possibility of applying informal pressure, and it seems widely agreed now that construction schemes in the inner cities should take on a substantial proportion of local labour. Moreover, it is still possible to lay down some conditions about the employment of ethnic minorities. Employment policies **within** local authorities may themselves also provide examples which can actively be pursued with employers in the private sector. This has been a matter of some controversy in many councils, but there has been a growing commitment to equal opportunity policies of one sort or another throughout the local government system. It is no longer merely a concern of 'radical' or Labour councils, but has increasingly been taken up within the officer structure, to the extent that,

formally, at least, it has become almost taken for granted as an ambition of good personnel management.

The preparation of local jobs plans, although initiated in 1987 as part of the Labour Party's preparation for the General Election, seemed to confirm a potentially important shift of emphasis, because the focus of debate was on jobs and the nature of employment rather than local industrial policies focused on investment and patterns of restructuring (Campbell et al 1987b). They began to make it possible to approach a much wider range of local authority activities - e.g. including education - in terms of their significance for employment, as well as to make it possible to relate these to a wider vision of the local economy. The experiment of the jobs plans themselves does not seem to have been developed further with local authorities since 1987, but their significance in pointing to the value of developing a more systematic approach to labour market intervention and their linking of social policy objectives to employment ones do not deserve to be forgotten (see Murray, U. 1989, which argues for the development of explicit links between public sector employment and community needs). At the end of the 1980s a report produced for the Centre for Local Economic Strategies stressed the potential of a local authority related employment programme in meeting local needs, generating

employment and reducing spatial divisions (Campbell et al 1988).

The importance of local initiatives as a base for wider economic revival has been noted more widely, in the context of a move away from mass production industries in the process of economic restructuring (see, for example, Hirst and Zeitlin 1989, particularly the summary of the argument in Chapter 1, and the cases discussed in Chapters 7 and 8). The 1980s ended with economic development becoming an accepted (if underfunded) activity for local government, given formal recognition in the Local Government and Housing Act. Although arguably, by identifying specific powers and responsibilities the Act limits freedom for manoeuvre at local level more than the old system ever did, it may also give it added legitimacy and encourage further development.

It has been forcibly argued that "local economic policies can only have minor effects on economic regeneration" (Duncan and Goodwin 1985a, p. 253) and this seems to be widely accepted. The records of the GLC, which claimed to have created ten thousand jobs between 1981 and 1985, or of Sheffield which claimed a record of one thousand jobs created between 1981 and 1984, may be impressive in their own right, but they pale into insignificance in the face of the overall job losses experienced over the same periods (in both cases the total number of jobs generated

was around the annual rate for net job losses. GLC 1985, Duncan and Goodwin 1985b, p. 20). But in a sense focusing on numbers of jobs created may be to miss the point, and is in any case simply liable to encourage economic development agencies to exaggerate the figures.

In their analysis of the growth of enterprise agencies Moore and Richardson suggest that the key point is the extent to which they were encouraging significant shifts in culture and the balance of political power (Moore and Richardson 1989, p.154). Asking similar questions about the effect of the left initiatives of the early 1980s is similarly instructive, although the conclusions may suggest that the changes were less radical than their initial supporters may have hoped. Indeed it could be argued that they led the way in a wider process of political restructuring by giving such a high profile to the local economy in the early 1980s. The enterprise boards which they set up have easily fitted into the enterprise agency model, themselves suggesting partnership and a new closeness between private and public sectors at local level, and even those authorities such as Sheffield, which avoided the enterprise board model have increasingly emphasised the importance of public-private partnership, with the implication that greater attention needed to be given to the needs of the private sector (see Cochrane 1988, Cochrane and Clarke

1990, and Totterdill 1989 pp. 514-516).

The importance of differentiation between places in the competitive battle for employment, is now widely accepted, and goes far beyond a narrow focus on economic development, fitting in with wider ambitions to strategic decision-making reflected in the literature of the 'enabling authority'. A leading US management 'guru' sums this up in the argument that the "idea of 'what's special' about" a place "is decisive in determining the city's future" (Peters 1988, p. 143). The identification of special features has been a major feature of advertising campaigns in the late 1980s - picking up on the highly influential 'Glasgow's miles better' campaign. These have universally stressed the 'greenness' of the places being promoted, their receptiveness to high tech and service employers, and, where possible, their access to water based sport facilities, which seems to have become a symbol of high status. Cultural differentiation, too, has become an increasing measure of activism, with Glasgow scooping the pool by winning designation as European City of Culture in 1990, but with Birmingham (attracting the Royal Ballet from Sadlers Wells) and Liverpool (with the Tate Gallery of the North) also heavily in contention. Even the corporate logos of many local authorities have been drawn into the battle. Only the more 'conservative' (such as many inner London

Boroughs) have been stuck with the modernist corporate symbolism of the early 1970s - the rest have moved on to historical skylines, or symbols which suggest that even the most industrial of cities nestles gently in the midst of rolling countryside, or at the heart of a scenic valley. Harvey comments pointedly that "Corporatist forms of governance can...take on entrepreneurial roles in the production of favourable business climates and other special qualities" constructing "an atmosphere of place and tradition that will act as a lure to both capital and people 'of the right sort'" (Harvey 1989a, p.295).

It is possible to chart a highly negative vision of the future, in which elected local government becomes a largely residual category, dependent on the centre for finance and overshadowed by other agencies dominated by business interests. This seems to be the message of U.S. debates about local growth coalitions, between those who identify the dominant forces in local politics as developers and other property interests (Molotch 1976, Logan and Molotch 1987) and those who identify wider coalitions of business as dominant (Cox and Mair 1988, 1989). Whatever the basis of the coalition, both sides of the debate seem agreed that more democratic, citizen based activism is doomed to defeat on most issues. A pessimist might conclude that similar developments within the U.K. are likely to

mean that political debate at local level will in the future mainly focus on disagreements between property developers and other business interests (such as retailers, manufacturers, service industries). But, as was argued earlier (in Ch. 6), the extent to which the local state in the U.K. has itself had to construct and organise growth politics means that there is little evidence of 'growth coalitions' of the U.S. type in the U.K., but may also mean - as Cooke suggests - that there is scope for local authority led coalitions based around negotiation and more equal partnership with agents in the private sector and the community (Cooke 1988). Cooke argues that new opportunities exist for taking the lead in influencing the private sector through joint ventures of one kind and another (Cooke 1989). Hirst builds on similar arguments to construct a developed model of corporate policy-making, which draws together central, local and regional governments with business, employees and communities, to produce appropriate forms of economic policy for the new world he hopes to see, built around the possibilities offered by 'flexible specialisation' (Hirst 1989b). The role of the local state suggested by these arguments is an active one, rather than one in which business or a particular fraction of local business is dominant in any straightforward fashion. The developing arrangements are closer to neo-corporatism, like that discussed at the end

of the previous chapter, in which the local state still matters, rather than a neo-pluralism dominated by business (Dunleavy and O'Leary 1987, Ch. 5).

Notes.

1. The Local Government and Housing Act 1989 for the first time gives local authorities in England and Wales an explicit power to spend money on economic development, but within strict financial limits. It also severely limits the potential value of setting up local authority backed companies (including enterprise boards) by imposing rules which mean that any income received by those companies is counted against the parent council's capital allocations (although at the time of writing these clauses have not been implemented, apparently because they may conflict with the provisions of the Company Acts).

2. These arguments fitted in with a number of other debates around the appropriate form which should be taken by socialist economic initiatives in the wake of the perceived failures of the left both in the U.K. and in the state socialist countries of the Soviet Union, Eastern and Central Europe. Stress was increasingly being placed on the need for alternatives to forms of central and bureaucratic planning. See, e.g., Gilhespy et al 1986, Nolan

and Paine 1986, Nove 1983.

3. I am grateful to Jamie Gough for reminding me of the importance of this ambiguity whenever I am in danger of forgetting it.

Chapter 8. Looking at Sheffield: developing a case study

So far the emphasis of our argument has been on broader theoretical questions and wider processes of restructuring. In the next four chapters the focus is shifted towards looking in more detail at the ways in which the local politics of economic development changed over the course of the 1980s in one particular place. This chapter sets out to explain both why such a shift is necessary and why Sheffield has been utilised as a case study, before going on to outline the main features of the research process.

8.1 Why a case study?

Many of the most instructive discussions of local government and the local state draw on detailed empirical case studies. This is hardly surprising, since without such studies the practice of politics - particularly professional politics - is likely to remain hidden behind closed doors, finding only a distorted expression in the official speeches of politicians or committee minutes. Although in doing so he undermines some of the more ambitious claims of the ESRC's Changing Urban and Regional

System research programme, Warde effectively justifies locality research as a particular example of the case study method, pointing out that it is as case studies that such research is most valuable, as long as the aims of the studies are clear, they are informed by appropriate theoretical frameworks, and the cases to be studied are appropriate to the issues under investigation (Warde 1989).

There are four principal justifications for the case study method. The first is that made by Dunleavy, and referred to above (in Ch. 2), namely its use as a form of explication of already constructed wider theory, effectively showing how the theory works, and confirming its validity not as an empirical example but as a working out of the theory (Dunleavy 1981, p. 199). But Williams forcefully criticises this approach, suggesting that in practice it is all too easily reduced to little more than "a search for illustrative instances" (Williams 1981, p. 34). Harvey has been accused of adopting this method but protests vigorously against those who criticise him (and other marxists) for 'reading off' the particular from general theories (Harvey 1987, p. 373). As he presents the argument he is innocent of such charges. But, just as realist research can be caricatured as collapsing "scientific understandings into a mass of contingencies

exhibiting relations and processes special to each unique event" (Harvey 1987, p. 373) in order to highlight some of the dangers of using it uncritically (and thoughtlessly), so the caricature expressed in the notion of 'reading off' from grand theories provides a useful warning to those of us (including the author) who utilise overarching theories (or meta-theories) of society. Perhaps Marx was always able to avoid the sin of imposing *a priori* constructs on actual social relations; it is less clear that all of those who claim to follow his lead have always been so successful.

Harvey himself argues for a second model, based on choosing some relatively 'pure' case (e.g. Marx's choice of British capitalism in the nineteenth century) and using such a study to construct first 'concrete' and then more 'abstract' abstractions (such as value and surplus value in Marx's case). Similarly, in the case of the CURS projects, Smith stresses the need for a theoretically informed 'comparability' between the localities being researched (Smith 1987, p. 62). But one of the implication of this method is, of course, that it is necessary to choose the cases on the basis of some already existing theoretical model (in Marx's case, a model of capitalism) (see also Bhaskar 1987, p.71). It is, perhaps, relatively easy to see why

Marx chose Britain for his analysis, although even in that case Cooke points out that the justification is not always well developed, but is assumed to be unchallengeable ("Why not choose the USA?" he asks. Cooke 1987b, p. 411). In the second half of the twentieth century, however, it is even more difficult to identify the appropriate cases, perhaps that is why Harvey himself has sometimes used nineteenth century Paris. In practice choices are too often taken for granted with little serious attempt at detailed justification, as the frequent reappearance of a few regions (of Emilia-Romagna, Baden-Württemberg and Silicon Valley) in the literature of post-Fordist restructuring suggests (see, e.g. Sabel 1982, pp. 220-223 and 1989). Williams et al comment sharply that "The Italian regions are like Samuel Smiles heroes; they show us all that, with the right kind of effort, it is possible to rise above the disadvantage of humble origins" (Williams et al 1987, p. 437).

A third possibility is the highly criticised one of an ideographic approach, simply seeking to catalogue an endless series of uniquenesses, each of which might be interesting as a piece of local history but from which no more general conclusions can be drawn. As Warde points out, none of the researchers involved in the CURS projects saw themselves as

following this path although "some might unintentionally produce that kind of work" (Warde 1989, p. 275). Cooke's defence of Geertz' notion of "clinical inference" (and, by implication, "thick description") is, however, perhaps a more acceptable variant of this, encouraging generalisation **within** rather than **across** cases, in ways which then allow for a wider process of comparison between cases, as part of a process of "understanding the constitution of 'locality'" (Cooke, 1987a, p. 77). Geertz himself argues of his method that the "aim is to draw large conclusions from small, but very densely textured facts; to support broad assertions about the role of culture in the construction of collective life by engaging them exactly with complex specifics" (Geertz 1975, p.28). Whilst such an approach may be justifiable in the cultural and ethnographic studies with which Geertz engages and may, by analogy, also deliver important insights in the study of localities, it is difficult to see how it can provide an adequate basis for the exploration of more structured relationships (processes of political and economic restructuring) within a wider political economy.

A fourth justification is a rather different one, rather closer to the arguments of Massey outlined earlier (in Chapter 3), and offering a more

realistic possibility of understanding political processes at local level.

The search for 'generalisation' is likely to be a hopeless one: however many cases one investigates, they can always be disproved by a single counter example. A more modest suggestion may be that by focussing on the local (and, of necessity, on individual cases) one can begin to explore the interaction of social processes otherwise identified in theories. Up to a point, such interaction can be seen as exemplifying generalisations and theories - or, in some cases, as undermining them - but its study is also important in its own right because it offers the possibility of political intervention and/or policy analysis. It will always be more messy and less certain than the grand theories, but that should not invalidate it. Such an approach does not imply a rejection of theory. Nor does it even imply agreement with Castells' formulation that: "we need humble but effective strategies of theory-building that can lead us away from short-sighted empiricism without becoming lost in the artificial paradises of the grand theory" (Castells 1983, p. xx). This may initially seem very attractive, but tends to underestimate the need for preliminary theorising, without which the choice of cases is likely to be arbitrary - or, worse, made on the basis of unstated assumptions. A concern to explore the interaction between

social and political processes at local level should not undermine the value of or need for theoretical development. The two go side by side and should not be divorced, as they have been rather too easily, both in the debates about locality and sometimes in the practice of research. Local research needs to be theoretically informed, just as global analysis needs to be empirically rooted and has no particularly privileged access to the holy grail of theory.

The value of this approach and the way in which it influences what follows can be illustrated with the help of Figure 1 (below) which emphasises the processes of interaction to be explored in the case study of Sheffield. Figure 1 offers a highly schematic picture of some of the key relationships which need to be explored in the analysis of the local politics of economic development. It highlights the complexity with which different processes interact to produce distinctive sets of policy initiatives and political arrangements at local level. Most of the arrows point in both directions to highlight the extent of interaction.

The wider context is set by the operation of global politics and the global economy, which clearly set limits to and may even effectively determine what is possible at national level. But it is important to

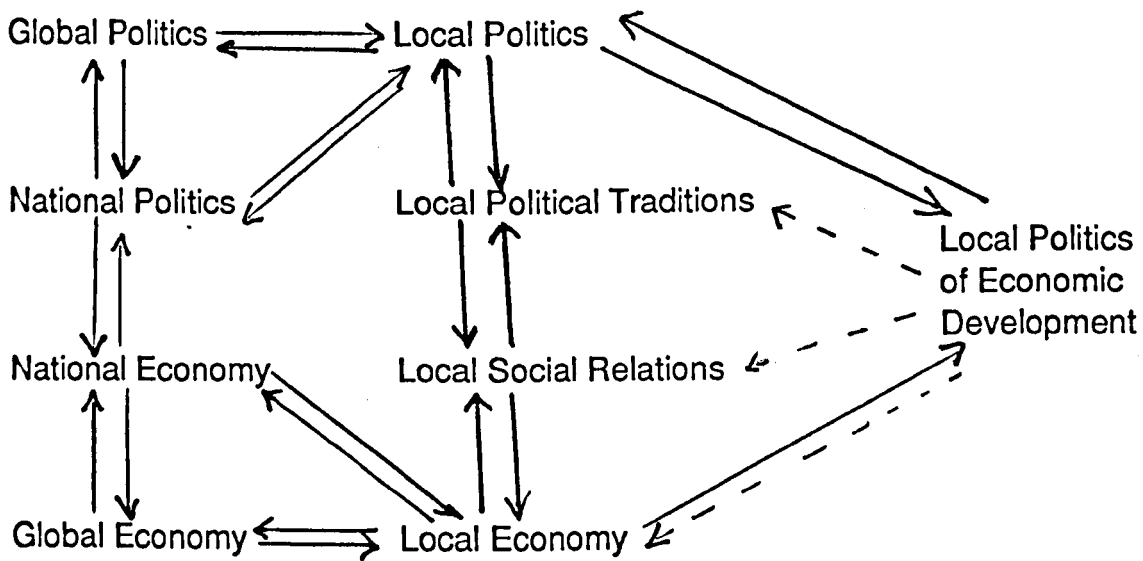


Figure 1. A Schematic Picture of Some of the Relationships underlying the Local Politics of Economic Development

acknowledge that local politics and the local economy have direct relationships with the global level: everything is not mediated through the national level. Such a conclusion would, of course, be readily accepted in the field of economics, since the U.K. has particularly open economy. The importance of international trade, the operations of the City of London and the impact of inward investment from overseas for particular localities is widely acknowledged. Indeed, it might be argued that, as far as the economic well-being of localities is concerned, it is their relationship with the global rather than the national economy which matters most. The significance of political interaction may perhaps still need to be shown rather more directly. In this context the example of the European

Commission (EC) and its structural funds is probably the clearest. The local politics of economic development increasingly also involve the maintenance and development of extensive relationships with the institutions of the EC and with local and regional authorities in other European countries. New sets of policy networks are being developed which link the local and global levels.

The contention that the operation of local politics is influenced by national politics is not one which is likely to be seriously challenged from any source, but it is perhaps worth stressing three points for our purposes in this context. First, here we are talking not only of party politics and ideologies - although the experience of the 1980s suggests that the importance of these should not be underestimated - but also of intraorganisational and professional politics. In other words, policy networks matter. Secondly, here above all perhaps, it is important to note the interaction implied by the arrows pointing in both directions. Just as the national political context sets limits to what can be done at local level, so apparently unconnected decisions taken in different places may come together to shape and change the ways in which politics have to be developed at national level. The saga of the 'poll tax' in the late 1980s is

one of the clearest reminders of that. Thirdly, following Dunleavy, it is important to recognise the existence of a national local government system, and to build on this to recognise the way in which a series of local initiatives can come together to produce a national movement (like 'local socialism').

At local level, an attempt has been made to indicate a complex series of linkages between local economy, local social relations, local political traditions and local politics. The intention is to highlight a degree of local autonomy resulting from the process of uneven development, but also to show how that autonomy fits into wider sets of relationships. It is not absolute, and it is hoped that presenting the relationships in this way will make it easier to explore what makes the autonomy 'relative'. It is perhaps worth noting the absence of national political traditions and of national (or global) social relations in this figure. Their absence is one of the prices which has to be paid for the figure's relative simplicity. Clearly the political traditions which dominate in any particular place will themselves be the product of more complex processes of interaction over time and will almost certainly be linked to broader national traditions (such as those of the Conservative or Labour Parties), but our concern here

is to note the importance of the form that the tradition takes in a particular locality. Similarly, as should be clear from arguments developed earlier - in Chapter 3 - there is no suggestion that there are localities in the U.K. which have somehow managed to escape from capitalist (patriarchal and racialised) social relations. But the concern here is to focus on what is distinctive, rather than what is shared.

It may seem obvious that local politics effectively shapes the local politics of economic development as the figure suggests, but again it is worth spelling out quite what is meant here a little more clearly. There is certainly no straightforward equation between what is said in manifestos and in the speeches of councillors and the practice of economic development at local level. The local political system includes a range of actors whose interaction produces policy outcomes reflected in the local politics of economic development. In particular, in addition to the open politics of committees, council meetings and official minutes, it includes introrganisational negotiation involving officials, professionals as well as councillors. It also includes party political organisations outside the council itself, and the representation of key interests at local level (most obviously in the context of this argument business and trade union

interests, but in principle other interests - e.g. reflected through single issue campaigns - might also be important). The institutional expressions of local politics may also have their own weight as they help to structure what is possible and what may legitimately be included on local political agendas.

The figure suggests that the local politics of economic development is the resultant of the complex processes of interaction outlined above, particularly as reflected through the operations of the local economy and local politics. Again, some qualifications may be in order, if only to highlight the complexity, simplified in the figure. The representations of both local politics and the local economy may also be important. For example, an understanding of local politics as dominated by the 'loony left' may influence both what is possible and what is attempted. Similarly, an understanding of the local economy as dominated by traditional manufacturing may encourage the development of policies intended to revive manufacturing industry. Equally important, it may be necessary to confirm the point made above that the linkages between the local politics of economic development and national and global politics and economy are not always mediated through the local level. The potential impact of global

(and national) economic restructuring is clear enough and at particular moments is likely to create and restrict opportunities for bargaining with potential developers and investors.

The operation of the local politics of economic development may itself also help to reshape the wider processes of local politics, for example by encouraging the questioning of old ways of doing things, and by encouraging the legitimization of particular political interests. It may help to change the political culture underlying the local system. The extent to which it can significantly change or positively restructure the operations of the local economy is rather more open to question, and doubts about this are expressed in the use of a dotted line feeding back from the politics of economic development to the local economy. It may be possible to identify some impact (and as we have seen in Chapter 7) a great deal of research time has been oriented towards discovering what it might be. But the most obvious changes so far seem to be in the field of politics rather than the economy. The local politics of economic development may also feed back into local political traditions and even into local social relations (for example, by helping to change the status of particular forms of employment) but any such changes are more likely to be apparent in the

long rather than the short term.

It is only by focusing in some detail the experience of a particular case that it is possible to explore the full complexity and subtlety of the interrelationships which we are trying to understand. But it is also necessary to have an understanding of the broader processes which influence and the context within which local developments take place. It is this which justifies the simplification expressed in Figure 1. The relationships which it identifies are those which need to be analysed more specifically at local level. They provide a starting point for, not the conclusion of, the necessary analysis.

8.2 Why Sheffield?

Here, we have chosen to concentrate on the development of new economic policies in Sheffield in the 1980s, with some reflection back to the 1970s and some forward to the beginning of the 1990s, as well as across to other councils with similar ambitions at the same time. The choice of Sheffield can be justified on a number of grounds. It was a widely acknowledged leader in developing new initiatives at that time,

with a high national profile also reflected in the academic literature. Many of the issues identified earlier in terms of academic debates - particularly as they relate to local autonomy and the scope for action - were actively discussed within the council at this time. If any local authority in the UK can be defined as a 'locality', Sheffield can. For Cooke, one of the aims (and results) of the ESRC's Changing Urban and Regional System research initiative was to make it possible to identify 'proactive' localities (Cooke 1989, 1991). Sheffield probably has a greater claim to being 'proactive' than any of those studied within the project (with the possible exceptions of Swindon and Teesside).

Not only has Sheffield been economically quite distinctive and self-contained, with its historic industrial bases, first in cutlery and then in steel and heavy engineering, but it has a local reputation for social and political cohesion, as "The largest village in England" (Child and Paddon 1984, p. 18 and Johnson and Cochrane 1981, p.34). Duncan and Goodwin use it as an example of a 'red island' in which "local causal relations" can be identified as important elements in the explanation of specifically local policy developments (both in housing and in economic policy) (Duncan and Goodwin 1988, pp. 58-9. See also Dickens et al 1985, pp161-178). More

recently, it has been in the forefront of moves to public-private partnership and presented as a case by those seeking to encourage the spread of such initiatives (see, e.g., Field 1990 and Fogarty and Christie 1990, Ch. 4)

Sheffield's new economic initiatives of the early 1980s represented one of the main elements of Sheffield's commitment to a form of local socialism. They were not part of any nationally agreed and determined strategy. Looking at their development more closely will also make it easier for us to assess the usefulness of the theoretical approaches discussed earlier. There are likely to be two principal constraints faced by any council seeking to develop socialist local economic policies: first, those engendered by local government's position within a national system of government, or national state system; and secondly, those which stem from its relationship with the capitalist economy into which it is seeking to intervene (Gurr and King 1987). The local state may be autonomous in the sense that it has a degree of independence of the national state, while still being unable to escape from its role within the organisation of capitalism (e.g., following Harvey, because it is trapped within a process of competition for growth). These initiatives encourage a focus on the development of relations between the local state and industry, which will

be helpful in assessing the extent to which theories of corporatism have any purchase at local level, as well as making it possible to ask just how 'local' its local socialism was, looking on the roles of professionals as well as politicians. The process of policy development in Sheffield illustrates the extent and importance of the constraints and limitations faced by local authorities in developing their independent programmes, but also suggests that there is still significant scope for local initiative.

8.3 Researching Sheffield

Although the bulk of the fieldwork took place in the 1980s, it built on earlier work undertaken in the late 1970s in connection with another project which was concerned with a comparison between local economic policy-making in the U.K. and the Federal Republic of Germany (published as Cochrane 1980, Johnson and Cochrane 1981). Sheffield was one of the case studies on which the U.K. side of the project was based. At that time interviews were conducted with a range of relevant council officers and politicians, as well as officers of the local trades council and chamber of commerce. Published and unpublished documents were also studied (the

results of the Sheffield case study were summarised in Cochrane 1979).

The importance of this work was both that it helped ensure access for the later research and that it made it possible to reflect back on and assess the significance of the changes at the start of the 1980s. It was not necessary to rely on the retrospective justifications of those who developed the new initiatives - or, at least, it was possible to set them alongside other assessments made when the council was still committed to the older policies.

The core of the fieldwork took place in the early 1980s (1983-84), when the ambitions of the 'local socialists' were greatest, and the impact of the changes was being felt most clearly. It was based around a lengthy and extensive series of interviews with politicians and officers (new and old)¹. Further interviews were conducted with representatives of the District Labour Party, the Trades Council and the Chamber of Commerce². A range of published and unpublished documents produced within the Council's departments and by its politicians was considered, alongside other relevant local material (including local newspapers, reports and other documentary material prepared by the Labour Party, Trades Council and Chamber of Commerce)³.

In addition the research involved participation in work intended to prepare proposals for the Lower Don Valley. The Employment Department's initial proposals had been dismissed by the Labour Group and my involvement was part of an attempt to put together a more acceptable set of proposals. It resulted in the production of a report (Sheffield City Council Central Policy Unit 1984) which set the scene for later policy developments in the field. This participation ensured access to a series of interdepartmental meetings, and to internal documents associated with the Lower Don Valley. It also meant that it was possible (and necessary) to focus attention on one particular set of initiatives in discussion with a range of officers and politicians, which made it easier to identify differences, tensions, power relations and areas of agreement between different groups, professionals and politicians. It not only highlighted differences between the Employment and Planning Department, but also differences in emphasis between politicians and the Employment Department, and differences within the department. Research also sometimes relies on chance and in this case proposals for the Lower Don Valley, which seemed rather marginal in the early 1980s, became far more central to the council's initiatives later in the decade, as well as providing

the basis for developed partnership initiatives and the setting up of the Sheffield Development Corporation.

Contacts were sustained over the rest of the decade, and concerns raised in the first phase of fieldwork were followed up, often through more informal contact and discussion, particularly with senior officers of the Department of Employment and Economic Development. It was clear that changes were taking place and it became necessary to undertake more consistent follow up interviews and a more extensive review of documentary evidence which reflected these changes. Again, therefore, interviews were conducted with officers and councillors, but on a smaller scale than in the first round, since it was possible to focus more narrowly on a limited range of concerns around particular initiatives and apparent shifts in emphases (the initiatives on which attention was focused were the Red Tape Studios and the Lower Don Valley - see Chapter 13 - and the significance of 'partnership' was a clear area of concern, alongside an interest in developing relationships with the European Commission)⁴.

Stretching the research process out across the 1980s has had some clear disadvantages, in terms of sustaining interest, maintaining contact and making systematic links. But it has also had very clear advantages,

making it possible to pursue the development of a new set of initiatives from beginning to end and to intervene with a clearer understanding of what matters at the end of the decade, based on analysis undertaken earlier. The Employment Committee and Employment Department set up in 1981 ceased to exist in 1991, when they were absorbed by an expanded planning committee and planning department. Superficially it looked as if the process had turned full circle, drawing a relatively brief radical interlude to a close. But the research on which this thesis is based suggests that the changes which took place were more significant than that, even if they did not help to produce an alternative socialist model capable of challenging Thatcherism .

One danger of interview based research, particularly when supported by more informal forms of research (including what could be described as participant observation) is that the researcher becomes sucked into and begins to share the outlook of the group being researched. The interview format encourages this because the interviewer has to gain the confidence of the interviewee and gratitude at gaining access may also easily be transferred into sympathy for those who have granted it. These are points made forcibly and convincingly by Rosenberg, who points to the extent to

which he began to feel "a genuine sympathy and even respect for the elite professionals" (mainly treasurers and directors of social services departments) whom he was interviewing, despite an initial distance from them (and a political predeliction to distrust them) (Rosenberg 1989, p. 244). How much easier it is to be drawn into such a position when the group being interviewed is already viewed more sympathetically by the researcher, as was the case here. Escaping from this potential captivity (as Rosenberg describes it) is partly a matter of understanding that it is a danger and partly a matter of drawing in evidence from a wide range of sources. These sources may be within the fieldwork, for example ensuring that a range of different individuals (with potentially different ways of understanding the same events) are interviewed, or ensuring that wide range of other forms of evidence (from attendance at meetings, informal discussion, published and unpublished documentation) is considered.

But other sources outside the fieldwork may also be important, for example reflected in the debates around 'locality' which are discussed in Chapter 3 and which encourage a different way of cutting through the evidence. In this case an important aspect of gaining some distance from the detailed fieldwork was also simply one of time. At first, it was too

easy to get into the detailed agreements and disagreements of professionals and politicians, to record it and to give it a higher status than it deserved. Privileged access encouraged the researcher to feel that his grasp of detail meant he knew more about political processes than those with less access, but it also effectively meant that it was too easy to get buried in the mass of detail with no clear lines coming through it. To a large extent those lines became clearer over time (partly because other researchers were also writing about Sheffield - e.g., in particular, Seyd and Lawless), and as a result it was easier to return to the detail and interrogate it once more.

Notes

1. Those interviewed at this time (sometimes more than once) included: John Benington (Employment Coordinator), Rab Bird (Municipal Enterprise, Employment Department), David Blunkett (Leader of Sheffield City Council, later M.P.), David Bradley (Planning Department), Andrew Coulson (Economic Development and Major Investments, Employment Department),

Peter Cromar (Aids to Enterprises, Employment Department), John Darwin (New Technology, Employment Department, later Deputy Director and Director), David George (Estates Surveyor), Chris Freegard (Planning Department, later Director of Planning, Sheffield Development Corporation), Geoff Green (Principal Strategy Officer), G. Jennings (Treasurer's Department), Ron Knowles (Chief Personnel Officer), Alan McGauley (Sheffield Co-operative Development Group), Bill Michie (Chair of Employment Committee, later M.P.), David Morgan (Councillor, member of Employment Committee), Mick Paddon (Employment Resources and Research Unit, Employment Department), Ian Podmore (Chief Executive), Jude Stoddart (Women's Officer, Employment Department), Arroll Winning (Director of Recreation Department), and Peter Wigley (Head of Publicity Department).

2. These included interviews with Dan Sequerra, then Chair of the District Labour Party and member of Employment Working Party, later Director of the Employment Department (and the renamed Department of Employment and Economic Development).

3. Where quoted or used directly, these documents are listed in the references, but many of those studied are not listed there because they

have not been used in that way. All of them have, however, helped to shape the assessments made in this thesis. The references are listed as far as possible in the form in which they were published. No attempt has been made to impose a universal system on them: this means that in some cases they will appear as publications of City of Sheffield, in others as City of Sheffield MDC and in others as Sheffield City Council, as well as under the names of the departments which produced them.

4. The main interviews conducted in 1989 were undertaken with Helen Jackson (Chair of the Employment Committee), Paul Skelton (Principal Strategy Officer seconded to Municipal Enterprise, Employment Department), Moira Sutton (Manager of Red Tape Studios), Ursula Edmonds (European Officer, Treasurer's Department). Interviews were also conducted with Dan Sequerra (Director of Employment and Economic Development) between 1988-1989, with Eric Wright, the Regional Director of the Department of Trade and Industry and with David Blunkett (by then an M.P.).

Chapter 9. Sheffield: background and context

Sheffield was one of a small number of authorities in the early 1980s which was identified with, and whose political leadership explicitly identified it with, various experiments in the development of local socialism (see, e.g. Alcock and Lee 1981, Blunkett 1981a, c and 1984b, Blunkett and Green 1983, and Blunkett and Jackson, K. 1987, Green, G. 1987). Outside London, it was the council most closely associated with the development of socialist local economic strategies, and in 1981 was the first to set up a separate and identifiable Employment Department (see, e.g., Alcock et al 1984, Blunkett and Green 1983, pp.7-20, Coulson and Baker 1984, Goodwin 1986, Grayson 1983). For our purposes, the development of Sheffield's employment initiatives is of interest, not only for its own sake (for example, because the initiatives themselves may illustrate alternatives to standard or traditional forms of economic intervention by the state) but also because of the light it casts on wider debates about the nature of the local state and local politics.

As the arguments in Chapters 2 and 3 have suggested, there are two particular debates on which we intend to reflect with the help of a consideration of the Sheffield experience: the first concerns itself with

the nature of the local state, and the second with the notions of locality, local social relations and local politics. In principle, one might expect these two debates to overlap and interrelate to a significant extent, but in practice they tend to exist in separate conceptual boxes which makes it difficult for either of them adequately to explain the operation of local political systems. The need to break out of the conceptual restraints of the two debates can be seen in a discussion of Sheffield, and the value of bringing them together can be illustrated from a consideration of the Sheffield experience. Understanding and exploring policy change at local level implies both a need to locate it within the structures of a wider political and economic system, and a need to locate it precisely within a particular place at a particular time.

9.1 Location and economic structure

Sheffield has traditionally been a rather self-contained city. It is not surrounded by a 'Greater Sheffield' of the type familiar from some of Britain's other metropolitan areas - South Yorkshire was never centred on one city, but is made up of four relatively independent and quite distinct urban centres, in terms of economic structure, social and political

structures (Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield). This is stressed by Smith in his analysis of Sheffield's political development through the nineteenth century, and contrasted sharply with Birmingham's position at the centre of a regional communications network (Smith 1982, pp. 255-256). An official report commented as long ago as 1889 that Sheffield was more like a village than a town, "for over wide areas each person appears to be acquainted with every other, and to be interested with that other's concern" (quoted in Smith 1982, p. 31). And this comment was still echoed in popular consciousness in the 1980s. Hampton notes of the Sheffield's reputation as 'the largest village' in England, adding that "the phrase has much accuracy; but the implied sneer has little relevance to the attractive city of the 1970s" (Hampton 1978, p. 155).

Sheffield's growth has not been based on large scale in-migration from outside its region. On the contrary, compared with other industrial cities in the U.K., it has always drawn less on the waves of international migration whether from Ireland in the nineteenth century or from the U.K.'s old colonies in the post War period. Even after the immigration of the 1950s and 1960s, the proportion of residents who had been born in the U.K.'s 'Commonwealth, colonies and protectorates' was well below the national average (Hampton 1970, Table 2.2). At the beginning of the 1970s

Hampton summed up Sheffield's position: "The general impression remains, therefore, of a city which is homogeneous in its population, relatively static in its composition and comparatively unaffected by the outside influences that affect a major centre of commerce and communications" (Hampton 1970, p. 38)¹.

Sheffield's employment structure has historically been dominated by a limited number of industries. It is well known as 'Steel City' (see Beattie 1986) and until the end of the 1970s, the dominant employment for men in Sheffield was in specialist engineering (including hand tools) and in the manufacture of steel, particularly special steels. In the mid 1970s, nearly 30% of Sheffield's working population was employed in metal manufacturing and metal goods n.e.s., compared with around 5% for the country as a whole (South Yorkshire County Council 1976). In 1977 45% of male employment was in steel and engineering (Sheffield Trades Council 1982, p. 7). Although the city's cutlery industry is famous, its importance in terms of employment has declined dramatically since the late 1950s (from 11700 in 1959 to less than 4000 in the mid 1980s). Until the 1980s, the proportion of employees in the service sector was significantly below the national average, in part because of its strong manufacturing base, and in part because Leeds has traditionally been the region's main office and

administrative centre.

Sheffield's steel industry has always been rather unusual within the British industry, since "it unites the 'upstream' activities of melting and mining with the 'downstream' activities of metal manufacturing and engineering. The specific nature of Sheffield's steel making and its close links with the user industries locally, makes any clear distinction between steel and engineering in the city virtually meaningless" (Child and Paddon 1984, p. 19). Although Sheffield did have a low-cost quantity steel sector, its industrial structure was not dominated by basic steel production, but characterised by a wide range of steel related products. Historically, the cutlery, machine tool and engineering industries relied on and encouraged an emphasis on the production of high-quality steels (Coates 1976, p. 19). Even within the region there was a division of labour between Rotherham - which concentrated more on basic steel production - and Sheffield.

Although the British Steel Corporation owned several large plants in Sheffield, the private sector was more significant in Sheffield than in most other 'steel towns', largely because of the importance of special steels in the city. Whilst they were producing relatively low volumes of steel - and thus escaped nationalisation in 1967 - the private producers were mainly in high value special steels so that firms such as Hadfield's

retained a larger proportion of the market in value terms. Even Sheffield's BSC plants were specialist, producing almost all the corporation's stainless steel. Unlike most of BSC's divisions, the Sheffield division was profitable through most of the 1970s, and attracted new investment in arc furnaces.

In the 1960s it was widely feared within the city that Sheffield would lose, or already had lost, a large number of its main sources of employment. A number of pressures were identified as potential sources of problems. The smaller firms - which had provided an important base in subcontracting, cutlery and hand tools - were being absorbed by larger concerns or finding it difficult to compete and being forced to close. They were also coming under pressure as the result of the council's redevelopment policies and the stricter application of environmental standards. The cutlery industry was being damaged by foreign competition, and it was predicted that the larger steel companies would also face difficulties and a run-down in employment. At least one major steel works was expected to close. These fears found formal expression in the city council's submission to the Hunt Committee on Intermediate Areas (Hunt 1969) and Sheffield was included in an Intermediate Area for the purposes of regional policy in 1972.

Table 1. Percentage of workforce unemployed. 1966-75 and 1979

| | Average unemployment rates, 1966-75. | Unemployment rate, Feb., 1979. |
|---|---|-----------------------------------|
| South Yorkshire | 3.4 | 6.3 |
| South Yorkshire, excluding Sheffield | 4.4 | -- |
| Sheffield | 2.4 | 4.8 |
| Great Britain | 2.8 | 5.9 |

Sources: South Yorkshire County Council 1975; Department of Employment Gazette.

Although the fears seemed to find little justification in the unemployment statistics of the 1960s and 1970s, when the city's levels of unemployment remained at or below the national average, and significantly below those of South Yorkshire as a whole (see Table 1), there were already some signs of change. Reference has already been made to the continuing decline of the cutlery industry, which has had a high political profile as a symbol of Sheffield's prosperity, and over the decade 1961-1971, 25,000 jobs were lost in manufacturing industry as a whole. Between 1971 and 1983 it has been estimated that there was a reduction

of nearly 60% in employment in the steel industry, amounting to around 17,000 jobs. The decline was sharpest after 1979. Between 1971 and 1976 employment in steel only fell by around 18% and it actually rose between 1976 and 1979 to around 87% of its 1971 level, before falling dramatically (City of Sheffield Employment Department 1984, p. 2). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Sheffield's apparent strength in the private sector and in special steels became its Achilles' heel, as that sector was hit by a major slump and restructuring across Europe. By 1981 Sheffield's private producers were making substantial losses (City of Sheffield Employment Department 1984, p. 12).

During the 1970s, the rate of change was relatively slow. And the gradual decline in manufacturing was masked by gradual increases in other sectors of the economy, although these also tended to employ different people. Although levels of service employment in Sheffield remained below the national average, the share of service employment began to increase through the 1970s, and to grow at a faster rate than in Great Britain as whole. Between 1971 and 1975 employment in services and distribution rose from 42.8 to 48.3% in Sheffield, while rising from 54.2 to 56.3% in Great Britain as a whole (South Yorkshire County Council 1976). Between 1971 and 1984 manufacturing employment in the Sheffield Travel to Work

Area fell from 48 to 27% of employees in employment, while employment in services rose from 44 to 64% (Gibbon 1989, p. 6). By the late 1980s over 70% of the workforce was employed in services and distribution (City of Sheffield 1987) and numbers employed in steel were down to 13000 (Lawless and Ramsden 1990, p. 3).

Probably the biggest area of growth has been in public services, which account for nearly one third of all jobs in the city. The City Council was the largest single employer throughout the decade, directly employing about 17% of the workforce in the mid 1980s (Child and Paddon 1984, p. 19). Other major public service employers include the Area Health Authority, the University (third largest employer in 1988) and the Polytechnic (Gibbon 1989, p. 7). But there has also been a marked growth in employment in private sector services (accounting for 43% of the workforce²), in part encouraged by the commercial and office development, fuelled at the start of the 1970s by Sheffield's position as the closest Intermediate Area to London, which meant that it was not subject to Office Development Permits. The best known moves to Sheffield have been the Midland Bank's International Office, the Manpower Services Commission (now the Training Agency) and, in the early 1980s, the National Union of Mineworkers.

An important shift associated with the changing industrial structure over the last few decades has been in the nature of the workforce. Sheffield's traditional industries were heavily dominated by male employment. Around 90% of those employed in the steel industry were men, and steel and engineering accounted for around 45% of male employment in the late 1970s (Child and Paddon 1984, p. 19, Sheffield Trades Council 1982, p. 7). According to Hampton, in the 1960s some commentators described it as the most proletarian city in Europe "in which manual occupations, and especially skilled manual occupations form[ed] a large proportion of the job opportunities" (Hampton 1970, p. 47). In the mid 1970s, the proportion of women in paid employment was still significantly lower than in the rest of Great Britain, and much lower than in neighbouring cities such as Nottingham, where women have traditionally been employed in manufacturing industry. That has changed with the changes in industrial structure, since women have been employed in greater numbers in the service sector, and levels of female employment are much closer to the national average (Child and Paddon 1984, p.19). Throughout the 1970s the most important changes were taking place beneath the surface in shifts from manufacturing to services, from male to female employment, to the extent that past assumptions about the

importance of traditional proletarians - men of steel - were becoming increasingly unconvincing.

The significance of this, however, was easily missed in the context of the sudden whirlwind of slump which hit at the start of the 1980s³. The sharpness of the change is difficult to exaggerate. Until then, it looked as if Sheffield might escape the impact of recession which had already hit regions such as the West Midlands so hard. The extent of the shock provides an important backdrop to the development of new policies within local government. In 1981 unemployment rose above the national average for the first time and resolutely stayed there throughout the 1980s (between 2.5 - 4% higher at the end of the decade. Gibbon 1989, p. 4). "Sheffield began 1987 with the DHSS as the major 'paymaster' in the City. 50,000 people of working age draw benefit rather than earn a wage - and almost one in three have not had work for over two years. Some have yet to experience work at all - Sheffield has one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation" (City of Sheffield 1987, p. 2). The city's major industrial areas which once looked so indestructible as they belched out fire and smoke had been razed to the ground as a potent visual symbol of the change, and this was reflected in the language of local politics, which reached back to its old traditions for support.

According to David Blunkett, who was leader of the Council, and Geoff Green, who was a senior policy officer, "Sheffield's major industrial area, the Lower Don Valley, has been devastated. Only five years ago its factories employed 40,000 people in steelmaking and the downstream processes of stamping, forging and engineering. Now only half that number are employed. Factories have been closed, some have been demolished, and the new half empty factory units are beleaguered in a great new wasteland" (Blunkett and Green 1983, p. 7). A council document argued that, "The causes of this massive decline are structural, but the consequences manifest themselves spatially in the Lower Don Valley...We see the effect in Attercliffe - empty land, silent factories, derelict buildings, shabby housing, boarded up shops unemployment and poverty...Factory closures have left large tracts of vacant and despoiled land, millions of square feet of empty, often semi-derelict buildings" (Sheffield City Council Central Policy Unit 1984, pp. 5 and 7). Symbolically, the Lower Don Valley was at the heart of the city's economy and acted as the base to which its Labour leaders have frequently referred back. When Sheffield's mayor proudly celebrated the city as the most proletarian in Europe alongside Lille in France, it was this tradition of heavy industry and the community of Attercliffe that he was recalling (quoted in Alcock and Lee 1981, p. 74).

The jobs which were lost, then, were in the traditional sectors which in the past not only provided the base for Sheffield's prosperity, but were also vitally important in the political formation of the local Labour leadership. It was against this background of decline and restructuring that the City Council attempted to intervene in the local economy to influence the direction of change. But the appropriate forms of intervention and the direction in which change should be encouraged have not always been clear. Decisions have been made within contexts bequeathed from the past, not only in terms of economic prospects and problems, but also in terms of political programme. The complex interrelationship between the city's economic base, its political formation and its position within a wider economic and political framework helped to ensure that local economic policy was a site of major debate during the 1980s.

9.2 Politics and the unions

The roots of Sheffield's particular form of Labour politics are to be found in the industrial development which made the city grow in the second part of the nineteenth century. Building on an already existing base

of skilled metal manufacture and cutlery, the heavy steel and engineering industries began to transform Sheffield's 'East End' (the Lower Don and Sheaf Valleys) from the 1860s on. "During the nineteenth century the steel industry of Sheffield was transformed from a collection of some hundreds of small craft workshops concentrated mainly on cutlery to a group of mammoth companies involved in the manufacture of such products as steel plate, rails and girders. The small men continued in the cutlery and light engineering trades, but the emphasis had shifted to the giants" (Singleton 1970, p. 45). Not only did they create massive new industrial plants, but whole new communities were thrown up around them, in areas such as Attercliffe, Handsworth and Brightside. By the turn of the century, "Sheffield was divided so that the mansions were in the west end, while north, south and east were full to overflowing with slums and rows of barrack-like houses, crowding right to the gates of its factories and workshops, black with the filth of industry" (Murphy 1941, p. 33).

The arrival of the new industries also brought changes in the local politics of labour. Previously, this had been dominated by craftsmen, who were either employed in or owned small workshops, and were not necessarily committed to one employer for any length of time. The most active workers were "skilled organised, almost guild-proud craftsmen"

(Hobsbawm 1969, p. 72). Their politics tended to be radical or liberal, rather than socialist or collectivist in orientation, although they might also lead to dramatic 'terrorist' acts such as those associated with the 'Sheffield Outrages' of the 1860s, when the craft societies responded violently to what they saw as threats to their security and independence (see, e.g. Pollard 1971). Smith contrasts the neighbourhood based 'particularism' of the skilled working class of Sheffield with the higher levels of participation in political and welfare organisations common among members of the same class in Birmingham, and notes that this made it more difficult for employers to influence these workers in Sheffield, but also made it more difficult for the workers to organise wider political campaigns (Smith 1982, p. 256). This tradition survived, at least as an undercurrent, for some time and there was even an identifiable anarchist movement in the city in the last decade of the century (Quail 1982, p. 101, and Rowbotham 1976, pp159-172). It has helped to provide an often romanticised past to which Sheffield's left can appeal, without worrying too much about its historical basis. So, for example, Pollard identifies a pedigree, stressing the region's continued "independence of spirit, its rebelliousness" (Pollard 1976, p. 5).

Despite this search for roots in the more distant past, it is not until

the growth of the steel and heavy engineering industries that it becomes possible to identify the development of a more coherent local politics. Although Blunkett and Jackson, K. (1987, pp. 47-48) suggest a longer tradition of municipal activism as part of their case for the importance of local politics, Smith argues that until the last decade of the nineteenth century even Sheffield's bourgeois politics were very weak, with few of the ambitions of 'gas and water socialism' which characterised cities such as Birmingham. There was a heavy reliance on charitable donations with little support from the town council. It was only with the beginnings of pressure from below (following the formation of a local Labour Representation Committee in 1903) that local government began to take a significantly active form (Smith 1982, pp. 241-242). Smith comments that "In local government...the decisive pressures emanated from the development of class conflicts in the industrial sphere" (Smith 1982, p. 242) and these developed as the craft industries (or light trades) began to be superseded in importance by heavier industry .

The new industries ensured that large numbers of workers were drawn together in big factories, but at first the labour process in steel was based on the contract system, so that workers were employed through foremen rather than directly by the main employers. Contrary to the

arguments of Goodwin (1986, pp. 22-23) this seems to have meant that unionisation in the steel industry was relatively slow until the first years of the twentieth century. Even then the employers were reluctant to give recognition to the unions seeking to represent the production workers in the steel industry, who were often still casually employed. Until the First World War the steel trades unions were not fully recognised in the main plants, but the War itself ensured trade union recognition as the pressures for increased production from military demand meant that the employers were prepared to make concessions to maintain production and increase profits (Howard 1976, pp. 59-73). The steel firms effectively became arms manufacturers for the duration of the war.

Engineering workers were organised at an earlier stage and the Amalgamated Society of Engineers had developed a strong base in the city by the turn of the century, in part because it included members in the older ('light') trades. Increasingly, however, its membership was concentrated in the new industries, with 13 out of 15 ASE branches being based in Sheffield's East End by 1914 (Hinton 1969, p. 218). In these industries, the engineers were in the more skilled and more secure positions, representing about 13% of the workforce in the 'heavy' trades in 1911 (Hinton 1969, p. 217). They provided an underpinning on the basis of which the others - in

less skilled trades - could organise, and their centrality to munitions production (e.g. in the great Vickers plant in Brightside) gave them additional strength as suppliers first to the naval armaments race of first decade of the twentieth century and then for the First World War.

The experience of the steel and engineering unions in their fight for organisation brought different attitudes from those which dominated in the more traditional trades. Because the new unions were used to having to fight for recognition they tended to see the employers more explicitly as their enemies. Even before they were fully recognised by the employers, the steel and engineering unions began to stamp their mark on the local labour movement, partly through their superior organisation and partly simply by force of numbers as their membership grew. They set out successfully to influence the Labour Representation Committee and in 1908 took the initiative in setting up the Trades and Labour Council which explicitly linked the unions and the electoral politics of labour. The Trades and Labour Council effectively excluded representatives of the 'lighter' trades, which continued to organise through their own separate trades council, until 1919, when their council was absorbed by the Trades and Labour Council (Goodwin 1986, pp. 22-23, and Smith 1982, p. 246. The history of the Sheffield Trades Council is recorded in Pollard 1959).

Sheffield's engineering industry was one of the centres of the unofficial shop stewards' movement during the First World War, and the successes of this movement helped to confirm the dominance of socialist ideas within local labour politics. The shop stewards succeeded in gaining exemptions from conscription for skilled men and for a time seemed to threaten more radical - even revolutionary - change. They were in a position to negotiate directly with the state, something which more respectable methods had not achieved in a generation (see Moore 1960). J.T. Murphy, who became a founder member of the Communist Party, was one of the unofficial leaders in Sheffield, and a theorist of revolutionary syndicalism (Murphy 1918). Even at the height of the agitation in Sheffield, however, there was no equivalent political movement to the one which developed within industry, although a Sheffield Worker's Committee was set up briefly in 1917 and some attempts were made to move beyond the base of skilled workers, for example, by seeking to involve the new women workers. But the tensions between the more radical leadership and their supporters was apparent in strikes in favour of craft privileges which also took place in 1917 (Hinton 1969, p. 284. See Hinton 1973 for a discussion of the wider political significance of the shop stewards' movement)⁴. An informal division between industrial and electoral politics was

inaugurated and sustained. The Communist Party was to develop an important role within Sheffield's trade unions, dominating the industrial side of local labour politics, but in electoral politics support for the Labour Party was maintained. In 1926 Labour took control of the City Council, only losing it twice since then - for short periods, in 1932 and 1968.

Labour's initial success in Sheffield was based on its roots in the unions, which also found expression in the development of tight knit communities around the steel plants, where the Labour vote remained high from the 1920s onwards. This base in the trade unions and related communities was to remain important for fifty years and was reinforced both by continued industrial centralisation in large units in Sheffield's narrow industrial belt, and by the apparent success of the alliance between the trade unions and the Labour Party in power at local level. Because of the existing weakness of urban politics, and the lack of a strong and active involvement by the local employers in the running of the local state, labour was able to take a leading role much earlier than was the case in some other major industrial cities (such as Birmingham) (Smith 1982). Although areas such as Attercliffe and Brightside changed dramatically after 1945 as redevelopment moved people away from their close proximity to the

steel plants, and their sometimes poisonous pollution, the new council estates sustained an equally secure electoral base for Sheffield's Labour councillors (Hampton 1970, p. 155). Attercliffe became more important as a reference point than as a living political entity - it represented a golden past of working class community within Labour's local mythology⁵.

The local politics of Labour which dominated in Sheffield were by no means exceptional. No doubt it would be possible to identify detailed differences between Sheffield and other Labour controlled councils in Yorkshire, but it is more accurate to see the Council as part of the mainstream of municipal labourism, within which, according to Gyford, Labour groups tended to provide a "political climate" within which officers could initiate a range of welfare and education services. By the 1930s, Sheffield was like most other Labour councils "in providing more generous public assistance benefits, more extensive maternity and child welfare services and more spending per child on education" than those controlled by other parties (Gyford 1985, pp. 5-6). A summary of the first six years of Labour control, prepared by the Council leadership as part of their election campaign, stressed the financial responsibility of the council, its commitment to welfare and municipal provision (Rowlinson 1982). According to David Blunkett's introduction, these were "the pioneers who

laid the foundations for the magnificent Socialist City of which we are all so proud". Elsewhere Blunkett drew on the history of Labour control in Sheffield to stress that Labour had always been committed to "collective community provision" (Blunkett 1984, p. 7), and this tradition of well managed service provision was the basis of Labour's programme while in office - in parks and refuse disposal, as well as council housing, social services and education (see Savage 1987 for a discussion of the similar ways in which Labour's programme developed in Preston).

There were continuing close relationships between activists in the unions and in the Labour Party. Wainwright stresses the importance of this "intimacy" and notes the extent to which it was carried on through generations - "often quite literally different generations of the same families, like the Caborns, Flannerys and Bartons" (Wainwright 1987, p. 106). She might have added the Hattersleys. For much of the post 1945 period there was an unwritten, but nevertheless widely acknowledged, agreement in Sheffield which assumed that the industrial side of local politics would be dominated by the Communist Party, whilst the local state was left to the Labour Party. Until 1974 this division of responsibility found its institutional expression in the meetings of the Trades and Labour Council. Councils of this sort were not unusual in

Britain's major cities until the national Labour Party and the Trades Union Congress agreed that it was necessary formally to separate industrial activity and electoral politics. These councils brought together delegates from trade unions and the Labour Party to discuss both local government issues and issues which affected people at work, community and industrial issues. And they also meant that members of parties other than the Labour Party could discuss Labour Party issues and directly influence Party decisions. In the case of Sheffield, the Trades and Labour Council offered a forum in which the leading figures in the trade unions (including officials) could meet and discuss issues with leading local councillors. It was, for example, the Trades and Labour Council which took the first steps in leading to the development of comprehensive education in Sheffield (Hampton 1970, pp. 235-6).

Since 1974, those links have been more informal, but the legacy survives in the form of a joint Secretary who serves both the Trades Council and the District Labour Party, created after the dissolution of the Trades and Labour Council. Throughout the 1980s the person in this post was also one of the leading Labour councillors. Nevertheless the breaking up of the old joint council does seem to have heralded (but probably not caused) the gradual decline of the old political arrangements more broadly.

As we have seen Sheffield's trade union movement was largely based on the steel and engineering industries and the unions associated with them. And in the 1970s, those unions continued to play an important role in local politics, being regularly consulted by councillors on most major issues (such as the setting up of a new Employment Department in 1980), particularly through the local Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions. But with the decline of those industries the importance of such consultations declined, and the District Labour Party became a more significant forum for debate and political legitimisation. The traditional trade unions are still sometimes given a higher profile in political debate than their membership might suggest, but their position is no longer taken for granted. The Trades Council remains an active force, still with a significant membership in the traditional industries, but increasingly also reflecting pressures from new unions, such as NALGO, to the extent that at the end of the 1980s the majority of delegates came from public sector unions (Child and Paddon 1984, Wainwright 1987, p. 108). In some ways, this makes the hoped for division between industrial and electoral politics difficult to sustain because the Trades Council is also frequently used as a platform for debates over council policy, particularly when there are disputes between the council and its

employees. But in practice it may also reinforce the significance of the division between the Trades Council and the District Labour Party, since the former becomes identified as the place in which industrial disputes may legitimately be discussed (even with the local Council), whilst the latter is seen as the appropriate place for policy discussion (rather than the discussion of industrial disputes).

9.3 Politics within the Council

The politics of the City Council were changing before 1980, when David Blunkett became leader and Sheffield became one of the 'local socialist' councils identified by Gyford. But the shifts taking place were not always apparent from the outside, in part because one legacy of trade union involvement in local politics was a stress on internal discipline and a distrust of public argument. Even in the late 1970s, few would have predicted that Sheffield City Council was likely to develop a reputation for its 'radical' or 'left'-wing policies in the 1980s. The way in which change was achieved, almost incrementally, provides a good example of the structures of council politics within which the wider changes of the early 1980s were achieved.

Ron Ironmonger (later Sir Ron) was elected leader of the Labour Group in 1966 and was seen to be a more democratic and open leader than those who had preceded him (Goodwin 1986, p. 29). In practice, however, he retained effective control over a Labour Group which remained highly disciplined. Ironmonger was a strong leader well known in the city and the wider national local government system, although he never took on a leading position in the Association of Municipal Corporations. Despite some involvement with the left of the Labour Party early in his council career (in the 1940s) few would have placed him on the left in the 1960s.

Hampton describes one major issue of conflict over the introduction of a rent-rebate scheme in the late 1960s, when the left in the Trades and Labour Council and in various tenants' groups campaigned for a greater contribution from the rates against Ironmonger and other leaders of the Labour Group (Hampton 1970, pp 258ff).

Elsewhere, Hampton outlines both Ironmonger's strengths and his position in the political spectrum (Hampton 1976, pp. 153-156). In retrospect Ironmonger can be seen as attempting to manage important changes in Sheffield's local politics, which gathered pace after his departure for the newly created South Yorkshire County Council in 1974. The membership of the City Council had traditionally been dominated by

men, predominantly drawn from the ranks of the trade unions. According to Hampton, "the virtues they honoured were those of loyalty and self-improvement" (Hampton 1978, p. 153). By the early 1960s the average age of sitting councillors was such that many of this generation were retiring to be replaced by younger people, the products of the post-war educational system and "frequently...from middle class occupations" (Hampton 1978, p. 159). In this respect, Sheffield was reflecting shifts which were taking place throughout the country (Gordon and Whitely 1979) as Labour Party activists were being drawn less and less from the working class and more from the middle class and party membership was declining (see, e.g., Hindess 1971 and Whitely 1983). According to Hampton, the new councillors tended to have a higher degree of ideological commitment to particular policies, such as the introduction of comprehensive education, which had not previously had a high profile within the council. They were prepared to challenge conventions which emphasised the prime importance of the effective management and distribution of existing services. More important, perhaps, they were not prepared to accept the very tight party discipline handed down from above which had characterised Sheffield's Labour Group in the post-war period (Hampton 1978, p. 154).

Ron Ironmonger was the leadership candidate accepted both by the old

and new breeds of councillor. According to Hampton, "he represented the younger element while sharing the background and long council experience of the older members" (Hampton 1978, p.154). And his management of the council reflected this position, attempting to achieve consensus within the Labour Group, but ready to "give a firm lead towards his interpretation of consensus" (Hampton 1978, p. 159). In his period as leader, it became possible for differences to develop within the group and to be settled without dramatic splits taking place. In practice this meant that his role as leader was a central one, with much debate handled through him, and the main emphasis of politics remaining on the Labour Group, rather than Party organisations or community based organisations. As the influence of traditional trade unionism faded, Ironmonger's position as leader appeared to leave him with a high degree of individual power because he was able to manage conflict (and achieve consensus) within the Labour Group, with the authority of Council organisation behind him. Although groups outside the Council were consulted, Ironmonger's main focus was on the Council and the Labour Group within it. He was able to develop a form of discipline within the Group based not on diktat from above, but wide agreement and acceptance that divisions would weaken the Labour's position in what remained a hostile anti-socialist external environment.

Despite the changes heralded by his election, Ironmonger can also be seen as one of the more positive examples of a wider British tradition of municipal labourism, described by Gyford (1985, pp. 2-13. See also Goss 1988, particularly Ch. 2). After 1945 it was Labour authorities of this type which most enthusiastically took up the possibilities of developing the local welfare state, particularly through expenditure on housing, education and social services (see, e.g., Sharpe and Newton 1984 on differences between Labour and Conservative controlled county boroughs in the 1960s). Within this tradition local government is seen as the local expression of the welfare state, attempting to 'get things done', rather than being a site for political debate. In practice this model tended to imply a disciplined Party at local level, in which the main decisions were taken by Group leaders and the Group as a whole was expected to endorse them. In Sheffield after 1966, as we have seen, the relationship was one of management - or coordination - rather than dictatorship, but, even so, in the fifteen years between 1962 and 1977, the recommendations of the Labour Group executive to the Group as a whole were only reversed on one occasion. The main role of backbench councillors was still to deal with local issues and casework for those they represented. For most councillors this meant dealing with housing cases and - overwhelmingly - tenants

wanted to be transferred. In retrospect this division of labour, even in its Ironmonger variant, has been sharply criticised (by David Blunkett among others) for being authoritarian and leaving insufficient scope for backbench initiative or wider backbench discussion.

But the criticisms have been taken further, to suggest that municipal labourism also implied a passive role for those receiving services. The accepted view was that it was Labour's task efficiently and caringly to deliver the services which the professionals (under political guidance) had decided the people ought to have. A Fabian belief in the value of professional expertise was the dominant one. Drawing on the Sheffield experience, David Blunkett was highly critical of that approach, which he argued "tended to be authoritarian: doing the right things for the people rather than with them. That's not how socialism should grow. It is oppressive at worst and paternalist at best" (Blunkett 1982c, p. 56). Gyford sums up the ambiguous experience of municipal labourism in practice in ways which are highly appropriate to the case of Sheffield:

"For all its faults municipal labourism, like the postwar welfare state of which it formed a part, secured considerable real improvements in the material conditions of working-class life. On occasion, however, it was prone to two weaknesses. It could deploy a certain heavy-handed paternalism, leading to an

insensitivity to the self-expressed interests of ordinary people when these seemed to conflict with the plans or enthusiasms of senior councillors or of professionals and other experts; and a certain introverted emphasis on political solidarity and discipline could sometimes blind local councillors to legitimate outside criticism ... At its best municipal labourism matched Herbert Morrison's aspirations to create in local government 'an efficient machine for a high moral purpose' and it delivered with competence and compassion a wide range of services to those in need. Usually it did the right things *for* people; but sometimes it could do the wrong things *to* people; and only rarely had it previously discussed either of those things *with* people" (Gyford 1985, p. 10).

When Ron Ironmonger left the City Council, there was no obvious 'leader' with similar authority over the group (or the local Labour Party) to replace him. George Wilson, the Council leader in the late 1970s was generally identified with the right (although he had challenged the previous leadership over the rent rebate issue at the end of the 1960s) and was less well able to manage the different wings of the Party. He retained some of the symbols of formal linkages between the unions and the Party, since he was a member of the Trades Council executive, but his trade union involvement can hardly be seen as politically significant, since Wilson was the owner of a small family upholstery business, rather than a worker in steel or engineering. It was clear from interviews undertaken with officers and councillors while he was leader that he did not have a

dominant position even within the Labour Group. In retrospect it is easy to see him as a transitional figure with little active support in the Labour Party or the wider labour movement, although for a time the structures of council power and the traditions of Party loyalty made him look virtually unchallengeable.

In the event, he resigned and was replaced by David Blunkett in the annual leadership elections in May 1980. This change reflected a wide degree of unhappiness with the way that Wilson ran the group and also reflected a gradual process of political change within Sheffield's Labour Parties, which is considered more fully in the next chapter, since the transfer of power from Ironmonger to Blunkett via Wilson also reflected wider shifts within the local Labour Party.

9.4 Organisational politics

It is easy to underestimate the significance of intra-organisational politics, because open politics takes place at elections and in council meetings. And the analysis of local politics frequently tends to focus on the ways in which changing patterns of occupational class, changing economic structures or debates within political parties influence and

shape it. This is also reflected in the previous sections. But the case of Sheffield confirms the importance of exploring the internal life of the state rather more thoroughly. Hoggett makes the case for such an investigation particularly well. Unless it is undertaken, he argues, "the state itself is placed outside politics. It becomes the site for the administration of things rather than a place where power relations are contested or where values and needs collide" (Hoggett 1987b, p. 32; see also Hoggett 1984). Yet this is precisely the context within which many of the taken for granted realities of political power are translated into practice, and in which many of the key decisions about the daily experience of urban life are made.

Municipal labourism assumed a local government structure with a strong officer hierarchy in which decisions taken by committee chairs were implemented directly and efficiently. So the intra-organisational politics of municipal labourism were part of a much wider political system imbedded in the structures of the UK's post-war welfare state (also often linking into national policy networks. Rhodes 1988, Chs 4 and 5) . And in local government practice this generally seemed to imply the creation of a powerful network of chief officers served by major (service) departments. It was these departments which actually came to to

represent the council, whilst councillors dealt with the problems generated by their individual case loads or set the broad parameters (or corporate objectives) within which chief officers and their departments were able to operate. In Sheffield in the 1960s and early 1970s, the power of the chief officers was such that councillors - even committee chairs - were not expected to visit departments of the Council or their chief officers without making appointments and making it clear in advance what issues they wanted to cover. There was an unspoken partnership between leading councillors and chief officers which meant that as long as the service departments delivered the goods, the committee chairs would fight for and defend their budgets in internal political meetings.

The most powerful departments and service committees in the 1960s and 1970s were Corporate Estates, Education, Housing and Social Services. Their committee chairs and chief officers made up the policy elite, to the extent that even the finance function was separate - annual budgeting was based on an assumption of incremental growth. Departmental boundaries were sharply drawn (Johnson and Cochrane 1981, p. 72) with committees and departments existing as semi-autonomous bodies within the authority, concerned only with carrying out activities for which they had been given responsibility, and with little direct 'interference' (as one chief officer

put it in interview) from elected politicians. It was often difficult to organise activity across departmental boundaries and there was frequently duplication of resources and activities between departments. Decision-making was fragmented, with major officers and committee chairs dealing with their own areas in a manner reminiscent of competing feudal barons.

The extent of the problem was recognised within Sheffield at a fairly early stage, in principle at least. Ron Ironmonger was the first Leader of the Council only to take on the position of Chair of Policy Committee and not of a major service committee as well, and this was intended to encourage the development of a more 'corporate' view of the Council's activities, at least on the councillor side. But in practice it seems rather to have allowed the Leader to act in a role closer to the *primus inter pares* of the feudal monarchies, than to have allowed him to develop broader strategies for the Council. Another attempt to encourage change was initiated by the Conservatives, in their brief moment of postwar political control, when they contracted a firm of management consultants (Urwicks, Orr and Partners) to prepare a report on the council's organisation and management (Hampton 1970, p. 56). Despite initial opposition to the report from the Labour Group, the need for some change was accepted by both

parties, and several of the proposals were taken up by Labour when they regained control.

But the broad commitment to some sort of reorganisation intended to make the unwieldy machinery of the Council more responsive to policy shifts did not result in any dramatic reforms, despite a formal shift to Bains Style management with a chief executive and management team after 1974. In practice the corporate system was very weak. Management Team was, at best, the site at which final bargaining between key chief officers took place and at worst a rather irrelevant body which was likely to be attended not by the chief officers themselves, but by their deputies or other senior staff. And even when defeated in management team, chief officers would often turn to their committee chairs for support in the hope of winning arguments elsewhere in the system. It was strongly argued by those in the service departments that major changes would only weaken important professional specialisms, undermining service delivery by burying it under the weight of corporate paperwork (Johnson and Cochrane 1981, pp. 74-75). In practice, however it was justified in debates about maintaining efficient and responsive services, the power of existing departments and chief officers within them was not easily undermined by the rather thin layer of corporate icing introduced from above. The

Corporate Management Unit remained marginal throughout the 1970s.

The attempts which were made to produce corporate, authority wide policy statements (for example in the form of a ninety-eight page statement of 'objectives' prepared on a programme rather than a departmental basis, City of Sheffield MDC 1977b) had little impact precisely because they ignored the power bases in the departments. The reaction to the 'Objectives' document confirmed the lack of a corporate approach, rather than marking its arrival. The document summarises disparate departmental and committee priorities without being able to offer any unified strategy for the future. At best its authors can be seen to have identified issues and interests which crossed departmental boundaries, but doing something about them would have required not agreement at corporate level, but detailed negotiation between the particular departments concerned. In some cases such negotiation did take place, and in some cases it did not. Whether it did depended not on the corporate planners in the Central Management Unit under the Chief Executive, but on the priorities of the departments concerned. These often owed as much to the priorities being developed within national policy networks (for example within professional groups, or relating to pressures from central government departments) as they did to any strategic

discussions within the Council. Despite a slight tendency towards a more corporate approach by the end of the 1970s, with more interdepartmental groups and a grudging acceptance that the Chief Executive might have some - probably small, and preferably subsidiary - role to play in the running of the Council, the dominant ethos remained departmental, fragmented, hierarchical and managerially conservative (Cochrane 1979).

Green's analysis of Labour local politics in Newcastle can perhaps be seen as an extreme version of municipal labourism, in which even senior members of the Labour Group seem to have had little influence on policy-making (Green, D. 1981). Matters were not quite so extreme in Sheffield. Nor were Sheffield's leading councillors bemused by the process of policy-making as a "complex and esoteric activity" although Gyford, drawing on Dunleavy 1981, implies that this was a common feature of local Labour politics in the 1960s and 1970s (Gyford 1985, p. 9). The division of responsibility between Labour and its officers still allowed for some interaction between committee chairs and departmental politics. Ron Ironmonger had a reputation for strong political leadership (Hampton 1978) and in retrospect the rather different experience of George Wilson's leadership looks like an interregnum between periods of strong leadership rather than the norm. Hampton's discussion of local politics in the 1960s

suggests a livelier process than is implied by some of the other case studies of municipal labourism (Hampton 1970). In the Sheffield of the 1970s, the Council's Policy Committee (all Labour and effectively the executive of the Labour Group) was an important political forum and capable of taking decisions on major issues which then had to be followed up through the authority. There was an implicit partnership, albeit one which assumed a high degree of officer initiative in policy-making.

This was the context into which the new political leadership had to make an impact. And they were in many ways part of or at least inheritors of the old system. They cut their political teeth within it through the 1970s, serving as chairs of major committees (such as Family and Community Services in the case of David Blunkett, and Planning in the case of Bill Michie). So not surprisingly, their rejection of it was sometimes uncertain. And in the following chapter we shall begin to consider some of the ways in which they were able to challenge the past, as well as some of the ways in which they built on it and - to some extent - were trapped by it.

Notes

1. It is, however, perhaps worth pointing out that the perception of homogeneity may also mask the divisions which do exist. Not only does Sheffield now include significant Afro-Caribbean and South Asian populations, but it also has a substantial Somali population initially attracted to work in the steel mills which is still further marginalised because not included in the usually accepted categories of the U.K.'s race relations professionals or the ideology of Sheffield's labourism. In part the 'largest village' appellation provides a way of continuing to exclude these groups from political life. Although the Somalis suffered worse than most with the closures of the steel mills (according to one person interviewed, in the early 1980s male unemployment among them was almost 100%) their problems were not reflected in the official concerns about the 'men of steel'.

2. And, of course, by that time including the newly privatised companies of British Gas and British Telecom.

3 The slump in the steel industry which hit Sheffield with such ferocity at the start of the 1980s was, of course, not restricted to that city. The world steel industry and the European steel industry, in particular, faced

major problems at this time. In Europe falling demand for steel, combined with trans European plans for restructuring, encouraged rationalisation within the British steel industry which led to a fall in employment within the British Steel Corporation from 186,000 in 1979 to 54,000 in 1986. In Sheffield the numbers employed by British Steel fell from 45,000 to around 13,000. The impact of world recession also meant that demand from major users of special steels (such as aerospace, vehicles and petrochemicals) fell particularly sharply. And, since Sheffield's firms had been unable to invest effectively in the 1970s (partly because of the difficulty of raising the necessary funds), they were uncompetitive in the harsher economic environment. The late 1970s were marked by mergers; and the early 1980s by closures. Restructuring in the 1980s helped create a new private sector by hiving off parts of British Steel and linking them with existing private companies. But the numbers employed after the restructuring remained low (see, e.g. Lawless and Ramsden 1990b, pp. 3-16 for a summary of this period. See also Gibbon 1989 pp. 15-17 on mergers and changes in ownership in the 1980s).

4. Hinton draws a contrast between Sheffield and Glasgow, where he suggests the possibility of revolutionary politics was more apparent, organised around the Clyde Workers' Committee, the Socialist Labour Party

and John McLean (Hinton 1969, p. 231).

5. Seabrook powerfully evokes similar images of working class community in England's old industrial towns, from Northampton to Walsall (Seabrook 1978 and 1984).

Chapter 10. The new policies: politics and politicians

10.1 The left comes to power

The apparent lack of controversy surrounding David Blunkett's election as council leader in 1980 seems to contrast sharply with similar shifts to the left in other authorities, such as the Greater London Council, Manchester, Lambeth and Liverpool. Child and Paddon comment that, "It was an uncharacteristically smooth transition - from the outside at least, a bloodless palace coup" (Child and Paddon 1984, p. 18). Blunkett himself commented that Sheffield experienced "a much more gradual shift to democracy" (quoted in Lansley et al 1989, p. 13) and Green argues that the transition "was impossible to pinpoint, as the old guard was gradually eclipsed and incorporated rather than defeated, though the election of a radical administration in 1980 was a clear finale" (Green, G. 1987, p. 206).

The shift between political generations, to which reference is made in Ch. 9, gathered pace in the 1970s, and was encouraged by local government reorganisation which removed a whole layer of the older generation with the abolition of aldermen (Goodwin 1986, p. 30). Sixty-two per cent of councillors serving in 1980 had been elected since 1970 and

the average age of councillors also fell through the decade (Seyd 1987, p. 144). The decline of direct working class involvement in the Party also continued - with two thirds of Labour ward secretaries in Sheffield in the mid 1970s being in non-manual occupations and eighty-five per cent of those being employed by local authorities (Chandler et al, quoted in Seyd 1987, p. 45). But this was not a straightforward process, with a growth in 'middle class' membership and public sector membership encouraging a shift to the left, while the working class drifted away from the Party. It is important to remember that some of the shift simply paralleled similar shifts in Sheffield's workforce. There was - as has been argued earlier - a 'gradual decline in traditional employment and an equivalent increase in employment in other sectors, in particular public services.

The new leadership did not emerge from opposition on the backbenches of the Labour Group. Its members already had experience of senior positions within the group and council. This was not generally the case in other councils in which the left came to power in this period (see, e.g. Gyford 1985 pp. 25-26 Lansley et al 1989, pp. 9-15, and Wainwright 1987 pp. 94-136). In Lambeth in 1977, Ted Knight came to the leadership from the backbenches, and many of the leading council positions, including the Chair of Housing, were taken by newly elected councillors. Ken

Livingstone came to power in London after a period of factional organisation within the Party, to ensure that left candidates were selected in winnable council seats. His success in gaining election as leader owed a great deal to skilful manoeuvring within the Labour Group of the GLC, but did not follow the experience of senior positions within the Council or Group (see Carvel 1984 Chs 1 and 4, and Livingstone 1987 Chs 3 and 4 for detailed discussions of Livingstone's rise to power within the GLC). In Islington, a left leadership only came to power in 1982 after the majority of the old Labour Group had defected to the Social Democratic Party and subsequently been defeated in local elections. In Manchester, the belated leadership changeover (in 1985) also followed local elections which changed the composition of the Labour Group. The new majority had until then not only been excluded from office within the council, but had been disciplined regularly - even having the whip withdrawn on occasion - for not voting with the previous majority on a wide range of issues (see Wainwright 1987, pp. 114-122).

The impression of an undramatic changeover reflected the extent to which Sheffield's Labour Group avoided serious splits and infighting, and the extent to which councillors who might have felt more at home under the old regime retained important positions under the new leadership.

Alcock and Lee quote one councillor who suggested that his colleagues were not "really very left at all, and certainly not as left as those on some other councils such as Camden and Lambeth" and that thirty per cent of Labour councillors did not understand or care about the new "socialist economic and social policy initiatives" (Alcock and Lee 1981, p.79).

Without attempting to make judgements on the relative 'leftness' of particular councillors, it is clear that there were important elements of continuity between the old and the new. The setting up of an Employment Department and an Employment Committee, for example, were key symbols of change in the local politics of the early 1980s, but the new Committee's membership included several councillors who had played a central role in the old system of economic promotion and industrial development (one member, Cllr. Lambert, had been Chair of the City Promotion Committee, whilst another, Cllr. Roy Munn, had been Chair of the Industrial Development Advisory Committee).

In Sheffield, key members of the new leadership had already served as chairs of major service committees - David Blunkett had been Chair of Family and Community Services, and Bill Michie, who became first chair of the new Employment Committee, was Chair of Planning, and both had also been members of the Policy Committee and active in the wider local

government community, e.g. through the Association of Metropolitan Authorities. In the late 1970s it was already widely acknowledged (even by normally cautious officers) that Blunkett was a potential leader¹.

There may, however, be a danger in exaggerating the smoothness of the transition, particularly when it is part of an attempt to distinguish it from those authorities which came to be labelled 'loony left' (e.g. in Lansley et al 1989, p. 13). In Sheffield's case, for example, it is important to note that at least one of the factors which seems to have encouraged increased sympathy for radical ideas within the Labour Party was a significant influx in the early 1970s of younger trade union activists disappointed with the record of Harold Wilson's Governments of the 1960s, as well as a number of tenant activists who joined the Party after having been involved in campaigns against the raising of council house rents in the late 1960s. Seyd suggests that it was changes in the attitudes of traditional communities of Labour supporters which led to radicalisation. Those communities, he concludes, were "becoming less deferential and demanding more action to defend their living standards. An aggressive political and economic militancy was beginning to make itself felt" (Seyd 1987, p. 60).

The left-right battles within Sheffield's Labour Group and Labour

Party were sharp throughout the 1970s. One of the first campaigns to deselect a sitting Labour MP took place in Sheffield, with Eddie Griffiths being replaced by Joan Maynard in Sheffield Brightside. Although this deselection did not attract the same media attention as the attempt to unseat Reg Prentice in Newham North East which took place at the same, time it was equally hard fought and bitter at local level. Seyd suggests that the recruitment of tenant activists to the Labour Party, following increases in council house rents at the end and dissatisfaction among trade unionists about the wages policies of the Wilson Governments of the 1960s helped to generate opposition to Griffiths: "The local Party wanted an MP who would identify with issues which were affecting working class people, and who would adopt a very different style from that which had prevailed in the past. He or she would have to be an active local campaigner, working with the trade unions to defend workers' rights rather than being the London MP rather distant and aloof from the immediate political struggles" (Seyd 1987, p. 59). Similarly, Wainwright describes the conflict as "a clash between youngish, mainly working-class activists radicalised through their union, the AUEW, or through the impact of a local tenant's campaign and rent strike and an ineffectual, conservative MP" (Wainwright 1987, p. 108). The leaders of the Brightside Constituency

Labour Party who were involved in this deselection were later to hold key positions in the Council, and included David Blunkett, Roger Barton, Clive Betts, Bill Michie and Peter Price (see, e.g., Seyd 1987, p. 206 and Wainwright 1987, p. 109).

Even the moment of transition should not be understood as entirely unproblematic. Although the previous leader, George Wilson, resigned and David Blunkett was elected to replace him with little opposition, Wilson did so at a politically embarrassing time for the Labour Party - just before the 1980 local elections - in protest at the Labour Group's decision to impose a rate increase higher than he thought advisable (Alcock and Lee 1981, p. 79)².

Sheffield's move to the left was the product of a series of changes within the Labour Party at local level, which interacted with the more general changes identified earlier, particularly in opposing the political direction taken by the Labour governments of the 1970s (see Ch. 5). Unlike those elements of the 'new urban left' elsewhere which emphasised their base outside the Labour Party and outside electoral politics, in autonomous campaigns and movements, the new politics in Sheffield was firmly rooted in the traditions of Labour (Wainwright 1987, p. 96). Seyd stresses that the initiative for change was taken by a relatively "small group of men"

within the Council's Labour Group. He describes their politics as "workerist" and emphasises their "local, working class background", although he also notes that several of them had received higher education and were in professional employment (Seyd 1990, p. 337). Wainwright's analysis is similar, although she emphasises that, whilst men may have been dominant in this leading group, a number of what she calls "strong, independent women" were also involved (Wainwright 1987, p. 109). Both Seyd and Wainwright confirm the importance of links with traditional working class organisations, noting, in particular, the links between Labour politicians and trade unions organising in the traditional industries (such as the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions and the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers) (Wainwright 1987, p. 107).

Seyd outlines the initial programme of the new leaders as follows: "their Labour Party should defend the working-class's living standards by maintaining the trade unionists' right of free collective bargaining and by subsidizing council house rents; their Labour Party should also curb the power of capital by extending public ownership. In addition they distrusted the elite parliamentary leadership which appeared out of touch and unsympathetic to working-class interests. Therefore they wanted a Labour Party in which rank-and-file workers could play a more prominent role.

This workerism...was rooted in the very powerful manual worker tradition which remained the significant force within the local labour movement at that time. It was militant both industrially and politically but also practical as a consequence of its deep roots within both community and work experiences" (Seyd 1990, p. 337).

Goodwin draws rather different conclusions about the nature of the new politics, suggesting that they were rooted in an attempt to sustain a past which had already begun to disappear. Like Seyd, he acknowledges the power of a local political discourse dominated by appeals to manual labour, 'workerism' and an almost utopian vision of working class Attercliffe and its community. But he stresses that the material basis for such an interpretation of Sheffield no longer existed. By the end of the 1970s, he argues, Sheffield could no longer justifiably be portrayed as 'steel city'. He suggests that the political programme of the early 1980s reflected utopian fantasies about the past, implying the attempt to forge alliances with social groups which no longer existed in practice (see also Child and Paddon 1984). But he goes beyond this to point to the possibility of a more coherent programme. The new policies, he says, can be understood as "an attempt to hold together the different interest groups which the Labour council now represents, in place of its former relatively unified and

homogeneous constituency of skilled, male trade unionists. It also helps to recreate, or recompose, a particular type of working class culture from above" (Goodwin 1986, p. 31). In other words, within this analysis, the task which the council leadership set itself was to construct a vision of the present consistent with that of the past, rather than to adjust to and acknowledge the changes which had taken place. Goodwin's approach is consistent with the incremental process of change which has been identified with Sheffield's move to the left, although it seems to underestimate the influence of political ideas drawn from national debates, as well as overestimating the ambitions and power of the councillors involved. There is not enough evidence to support the conclusion that the leadership had a clear programme along the lines he identifies, and, even at their high point, few of the local socialists would have argued that local initiatives could reshape classes in this way. They had few illusions about the resources and legal powers on which they could draw. The claims they made were always rather more modest, and ambiguous, whatever the rhetoric which sometimes surrounded them.

A clear feature of the politics of the new leadership was to emphasise continuities with the past as much as (often more than) breaks with it. Despite some criticisms of past practice, usually buried in general

comments about Labour councils as a whole, or particular authoritarian leaderships of the past (see, e.g., Blunkett 1982c), the new leadership presented itself as the latest in a line of Labour councils in Sheffield determined to carry on the struggle to defend the interests of local people. As Alcock and Lee argue "the commitment to *manage* the local politics of the area is written deep into the practice of Labour politics in South Yorkshire. The Labour Party is truly integrated - incorporated - into the running of the local state. The 'Socialist Republic' slogan is as much a proud proclamation of this record of the Sheffield labour movement as it is of anything else" (Alcock and Lee 1981, p.80). More positively, they argued that Sheffield provided consistent examples of positive intervention providing gains for the community as a whole, particularly as working class representation increased (see, e.g., Blunkett and Jackson, K. 1987, pp. 44-48, 52-55, 66). The new leadership was keen to place itself within a longer tradition of Labour Party politics at local level, also expressed, for example in the Introduction prepared for the republication of a pamphlet outlining the experience of Labour's first years of power in Sheffield (in the 1920s) (Rowlinson 1982). Many of the initial statements setting out the Council's new agenda were made not in radical journals, or even political manifestos, but in the official or semi-official publications of

the local government community, including a discussion paper presented to a conference of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities (Blunkett 1981a) and an article in Local Government Policy-Making (Blunkett 1981c).

10.2 Change from above

Although the political changeover in 1980 took place without any major upheaval, it nevertheless represented a major change of direction for the council, the initiative for which came from leading figures within the Labour Group. The change of direction did not come from within the council bureaucracy, as a product of debates between professional officers, whether in service departments or through the corporate planning system. But nor was it the product of challenge from within the local party organisation outside the council. Unlike many of the other 'local socialist' authorities, Sheffield's new political leadership came to power without having made extensive promises to local activists through the District Labour Party or to the electorate through local manifestos. Although it could be argued that the decision of the majority of Councillors and the District Labour Party to increase rates, maintain services and avoid cuts in spending precipitated Wilson's resignation as leader, the Party's

involvement in policy-making before 1980 had been insignificant. There was no tradition of preparing detailed manifestos for local elections, like that with which the Greater London Labour Party fought the GLC election in 1981.

The new leadership did not have a clear political programme or manifesto which it wanted to see implemented. Nor did it have an agreed programme for implementation which had been generated by the District Party, despite claims made by one leading councillor that "people elected the party to power on a programme and the councillors are merely representatives of the elected party" (Mobbs 1981, p.109). The formal relationship sometimes favoured by the left in which the District Labour Party (or Local Government Committee in London) was expected to set policy for implementation by the Labour Group was almost reversed in Sheffield. The ideas and policy debate came from the Council leadership, and effectively helped to shape the programme of the District Party. It was only when they opened up the possibilities, indeed demanded that such programmes be developed, that the District Labour Party moved in that direction. Goodwin reports on a "cynical interpretation" (apparently held by some councillors and officers), according to which the manifesto working groups "have been set up to ensure the smooth passage of controversial

policies through the labour movement. They are able to diffuse open dissent, by regulating when, where, and how much discussion takes place" (Goodwin 1986, p. 31). It was only after the change of leadership that a network of manifesto working parties was set up with the District Labour Party to cover key policy areas. From 1982 (there were no District elections in 1981) detailed manifestos based on the work of these groups began to appear, and the Council itself issued leaflets after the election, first to report that action would be taken and secondly to confirm that it had (City of Sheffield Corporate Management Unit 1982). For the first time the District Labour Party's manifesto was endorsed as a whole by the Policy Committee, becoming Council policy.

Blunkett himself took the initial responsibility of preparing policy statements on key areas (Blunkett 1980, 1981a and 1981c). The production of policy statements was a significant break with past approaches to managing the machinery of the council. And Blunkett's collaboration with Keith Jackson - a lecturer at Northern College - in preparing the statements (referred to in City of Sheffield 1983) also marked a change which was to be important in the new leadership's approach to organisational matters. From the start - as in the GLC and other local socialist authorities - Blunkett and his colleagues drew in people from

outside the council, and from outside traditional local government professions, to undermine and challenge the old ways of operating.

The importance of preparing local manifestos was also that they confirmed the shifts which had taken place within the Council. They made it clear that local government was a political arena, rather than a site for the operation of impartial administration. This reflected a concern of councillors about the power of council officers, more than any pressures from below within the local Labour Party, although, of course, they did fit in well with wider concerns for democratisation inside the party. By stressing the **political** nature of local government, the new leadership was also stressing its own claims to power. It was rejecting the old Sheffield - and county borough - model with its reliance on strong departmental empires guarded by chief officers rather than councillors.

Within the official machinery of the Council, the manifestos were used as tools of control for the political leadership, policed by the Corporate Management Unit, with the help of politically sensitive officers. They were used as corporate documents to help shift an apparently immovable council bureaucracy. Manifestos were not used as means of mobilising support more widely, or produced in numbers which would have made their popular distribution likely. In 1982 the manifesto was 24

closely typed pages long with some 47 detailed promises in the employment section alone. It was made up of separate sections of quite different styles, reflecting the different working parties (Sheffield District Labour Party 1982). In 1983 the format was similar, but the length had risen to 59 pages (Sheffield District Labour Party 1983).

The formal relationship implied by these documents, the various manifesto and (later) monitoring groups, which shadowed council committees, suggests a political subordination of councillors to District Labour Party. But the practice was rather different, in large part because some councillors effectively took the lead in developing policy, and were, themselves, active participants in the local Party organisations. There were examples of conflict - for example over the sale of council houses in 1982 and over the appropriate response to ratecapping in 1984-5 - but these conflicts were also important within the Labour Group. And, in the end, they were resolved by decisions within the Group, not the Party. In 1984, the Council leadership, with the support of the District Labour Party, began its resistance to the Rates Act 1984 by refusing to set a rate. A meeting of the District Labour Party in April 1985 rejected a Labour Group proposal to move towards setting a deficit budget and confirmed the position that the Council should refuse to set a rate. But a rate was finally

set before the deadline, because the Labour Group split with some voting for a legal rate (alongside opposition parties) while others (including the formal leadership of the Group) continued to vote against. Not only was the District Labour Party unable effectively to challenge this decision, but the Labour Group leadership was quick to move away from talk of discipline, instead seeing the rate setting as a *fait accompli*, not only working with it, but ensuring that there was no danger of a similar conflict in future years. Creative accounting was to be used to avoid making major cuts (the story of the anti ratecapping campaign in Sheffield is told in Blunkett and Jackson, K. 1987, pp. 176-181).

10.3 The new policies

The new leadership started from the position that the continuation of past policies was not enough in itself, not least because it was becoming increasingly difficult to sustain spending through rate increases and because central government was preparing itself to undermine the power of councils to raise and spend money. Blunkett asked "why local government is not popular to the extent that when there is a threat to the cutting of essential services people are not willing to fight vigorously in

many areas for the things we take for granted" (initially circulated as a discussion paper, later published in *Local Government Policy-Making*, Blunkett 1981c, p. 97). One conclusion he drew was simply that Labour's leaders had in the past been too unprepared to defend public services, because they had tended to accept the argument that production in the private sector was somehow always more productive than anything produced in the public sector - i.e. it was too easily accepted that the market determined what was and what was not productive. This is an issue to which we shall return later in the detailed consideration of Sheffield's employment policy. But he also went on to suggest that one reason for the political weakness of local government had been its reluctance to open itself up to wider participation and democratic control.

The new leadership was aware that it wanted change, and it was also clear of the general direction in which it wanted to move, at least in terms of overall slogans. It was opposed to spending cuts; in favour of increased community involvement in education, housing, planning and social services; and in favour of developing an economic policy which would create employment and improve conditions at work. Blunkett emphasised the need to look back to radical visions of local government in which councils were "organs for change, as important as national level

activity...looking at ways in which there could be activity from the bottom" and stressed that this meant industry and employment matters should be as important to local authorities as the provision of services (Interview, 12th April 1983). But there was less clarity on specific policies to be adopted, to the extent that early initiatives involved looking for ways of developing policies as much as specific policy proposals.

In November 1980 two policy advisors were appointed to service strategy groups on economic and social policy. The individuals appointed were drawn from outside the local authority system and - perhaps just as significant - from outside the usual labour movement and Labour Party tradition. Both had worked for Community Development Projects in the 1970s (one in Coventry, the other in Birmingham). Both had also remained involved in community based politics, although one was a researcher at the University of Birmingham at the time of his appointment. Neither was a member of the Labour Party at when appointed, and their politics owed more community radicalism than to the traditions of Labour Party leftism which dominated in Sheffield. One (Geoff Green) had stood as 'Socialist Unity' candidate (against Labour) in Birmingham in the late 1970s, as well as standing as a tenants' candidate against Labour while a student at Sheffield University in 1969 (this election is discussed in Hampton 1970,

pp 290-294).

The search for new ideas, having come to power, was a genuine one. The candidates appointed had past records which suggested they would not simply act as the creatures of those who appointed them. They were not straightforward 'political' appointments, who might be expected to act as agents of the Labour Party within the Council machinery - although certainly one reason for their appointment was a desire to shake up that machinery. Alcock and Lee summarise an interview with the two new officers soon after their appointment as follows: "Both were quite clear that their job was not to change the local authority from the inside but 'to organise groups - trade unionists, tenants - in the city, to put pressure on the authority from the outside'". They saw no real insurmountable problems in engaging in such activity against the local state whilst effectively operating as policy advisors inside the same local state. Indeed, they stressed that their own experience of the negative aspects of local bureaucracy and paternalism gave them a crucial 'cutting edge' in criticising existing policies and practices... They were quite adamant that the leadership of the Labour Group saw the limitations of the old paternalist social democratic practices. Social democracy is over as it has been practised at a local level in the past. We think many of them

recognise that, if they do not we can't help that'" (Alcock and Lee 1981, p. 90). However accurate this diagnosis of the Labour Group, and our earlier discussion suggests that it fails to acknowledge the important continuities with the past, these comments confirm that the appointments were intended to challenge past practices, even if it was still not clear how they would do so. Strategy was to be built up around "live political issues, being built up block by block, developing a clear set of connections between political principle and local organisation, a balance of contradictory forces rather than a single solution, a resolution of priorities" (Sheffield City Council 1983, p. 2).

It was in collaboration with Green that Blunkett prepared his first developed statement of what the Council was trying to achieve under his leadership, presenting it as a model of wider relevance to local government and the Labour Party (Blunkett and Green 1983). This pamphlet (entitled 'Building from the Bottom: The Sheffield Experience' and published by the Fabian Society), stressed the need to change the focus of Labour Party policies to encourage initiative from below, rather than the imposition of programmes from above. Its authors argued that economic and social policies could not be divorced, and suggested that economic policies needed to be developed at local level which could help to challenge

dominant forms of economic organisation, as well as helping to generate and defend jobs. In welfare they stressed the need to develop a strong and active community base, which meant that people would be encouraged to identify with services, moving away from the provision of services **for** people to the provision of services **with** people (see also Blunkett 1981c, p. 98). Not only does this suggest the need for greater participation and involvement, it also confirms a desire to move away from neutral administration by officers towards an active commitment by them to new approaches and an openness to organisations outside the Council and the Labour Party - in the 'community'.

It is, perhaps, important to identify some of the features of Sheffield's package of 'local socialism' which differentiate it from the programmes of some other authorities which attracted the label. Leading councillors in Sheffield seem to have been more reluctant to break fully with the structures of the past. So, for example, Sheffield was reluctant to set up committees or departments with explicit responsibility for women, equal opportunities or ethnic minorities. Until 1986 there was no Women's Unit within the council (although there was a Women's Officer within the Employment Department) and even when the Unit was set up, it was not independent, but placed within the Personnel Department (Seyd

1987, p. 151). Similarly the council was slow to accept the need to give separate recognition to the needs of the city's Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities; and at the end of the 1980s its main expression was within the Education Department, where the Sheffield Unified Multicultural Education Service was based (Sheffield City Council 1989, see also Blunkett and Jackson, K. 1987, p. 92). Although Sheffield did begin to develop some decentralisation initiatives in the early 1980s (particularly in housing) it was not one of the leading councils in doing so. On the contrary, outside the field of economic policy, the new leadership tended to stick with existing structures. Despite Blunkett's enthusiasm for it, there were certainly no moves towards the 'radical' decentralisation associated with Walsall or Islington (Hoggett 1987a and b, Seabrook 1984). There were moves towards the appointment of more sympathetic officers to leading positions in a range of departments, and some departments were reorganised (e.g. with the absorption of the Estate's Surveyor's Department into the Planning Department) but it was a gradual process, rather than a radical break (Interview with David Blunkett 12th April 1983).

The policies developed by the council in the early 1980s covered a range of areas, emphasising the links between the local economy and the operation of the welfare state at local level. The area in which new

initiatives were taken up most extensively, however, was that of economic policy and the next chapters look more closely at the changes which took place there (see Blunkett and Green 1983, Blunkett and Jackson, K. 1987 pp. 90, 92, 94, 96-103 and Seyd 1987 pp 154-158 for a consideration of other aspects of Sheffield's policies at this time). Duncan and Goodwin have argued that the council's economic policies were central to the process of political change because they were to be "used as a means of recomposing a political culture of radical labourism" which had previously been an integral part of the city's political life. The changing structures of economy and society (around white collar and public sector employment) made this more difficult to achieve, so the development of a local economic policy was required "as one means of halting cultural and economic decomposition or, more realistically, slowing it down until acceptable replacements could be organised" (Duncan and Goodwin 1985a, p. 88). A consideration of Sheffield's economic policies makes it easier to determine the extent to which it proved possible to develop distinctively different approaches, moving from general ambitions to effective policies, focusing particularly on the constraints imposed by the structures of local government (including intraorganisational politics) and those imposed by the policy area itself (which requires interaction between the public and

private sectors).

Notes

1. This was confirmed in rather unusual fashion in 1978, when I was undertaking research on local economic policy-making in Sheffield and was taken to interview David Blunkett (then Chair of Family and Community Services). Although Blunkett's involvement with local economic policy at this stage was slight, the officer who arranged the interview wanted to show that there were councillors at senior levels who were concerned with and could discuss broader strategic issues.
2. The high point of controversy around local government in Sheffield seems to have been in the earlier period (1967-68) when council rents were raised following attempts to introduce a rebate scheme. Labour lost control of the Council in 1968, and the Borough Labour Party (now District Labour Party) began to make demands to influence the decisions of the Labour Group rather more effectively. David Blunkett has argued that the dispute of 1967 and loss of control was "traumatic" for the Party and that it began "a shift in attitudes as well as in politics" (Blunkett 1982c, p. 56, also quoted in Seyd 1987, p. 144). This shift seems to represent the first

step in the process of changes which led to the election of a new leadership in 1980.

Chapter 11. Sheffield: looking for a new politics of economic development

Approaching the analysis of Sheffield's local politics in the 1980s through its economic policy-making is helpful both because it offers a discrete area of research where change can be seen most clearly and because it was given a high priority by the Council's political leadership. Until the early 1980s economic development was a policy area in which changes could be achieved rather more easily than in some others. It was not one in which major departments had highly entrenched positions, because it had not been the responsibility of any one department. Despite the widespread (cross-party) support for economic initiatives, economic development was not a core activity of the council, nor the power base for any leading local politicians. Yet it was also an area capable of symbolising a new approach to local politics, precisely because its expansion implicitly (and often explicitly) suggested a move away from a narrow focus on service provision. Here local government could be seen to be making claims to policy innovation in areas which had traditionally remained the responsibility of central government (see Cochrane 1986b). In Sheffield, from being a relative backwater whose committee was chaired

by a councillor close to retirement, it became of central importance, chaired by a leading politician (who went on to become an MP). The contrast with the past is instructive, for the elements of continuity which can be identified as well as the (possibly more obvious) elements of change.

11.1 Industrial development policies in the 1970s¹

Sheffield's industrial development policies before 1980 fitted into and reflected the political and organisational background discussed in Chapter 9, as well as the dominant approach to local authority economic development since 1945 discussed in Chapter 7. The two principal planks of the council's policies were the provision of serviced land and small industrial units and the attraction of inward investment through promotional campaigns and advertising. Goodwin has described the policy as one of "municipal property development" (Goodwin 1986, p.5) This may exaggerate the extent of property development in which the council could actually engage - it was never a dominant developer in the city (except, of course, in the field of housing, encouraged by the process of slum clearance), but was more concerned to make land available for development

by others, while itself engaging in a relatively modest programme of the development of small units. At the end of the 1970s, the council had plans to build around 30000 sq ft of factory space per annum (in addition to any work undertaken within the inner city programme), which was high by the standards of local authorities in England and Wales, but not in the same league as major development companies (Johnson and Cochrane 1981, p.47).

The City Council was in rather an unusual position compared to many others. It had a substantial corporate estate, mainly as result of plant closures, industrial dereliction and, above all, housing redevelopment. In the 'east end' of the city, the narrow industrial terraces left by nineteenth century industrialisation were demolished in the 1950s and 1960s, and the sites were generally viewed as unsuitable for housing because of the close proximity of heavy industry. They were scheduled for industrial use in successive plans for the area, despite romantic attempts by some Labour politicians to argue for the reconstruction of traditional working class communities on them. In the 1970s there was no question that this land was earmarked for industrial development, and even in the 1980s when plans began to include reference to the possibility of housing on its edges, there was still concern about levels of pollution in the soil (see, e.g., Sheffield City Council Central Policy Unit 1984, para 4). The

development of Mosborough (from 1972/3) as a form of local authority new town on the edge of the city also assumed the development of parts of the allocated land for industrial development to provide jobs for the new residents. In the late 1970s the City Council was one of Sheffield's three largest industrial land owners, alongside the British Steel Corporation and the Duke of Norfolk's estate. Between them they controlled two thirds of available industrial land (Johnson and Cochrane 1981, p. 45; see also Dickens and Goodwin 1981).

The council had a policy of positive intervention into the land market, but largely on a commercial basis, oriented towards achieving good rates of financial return. The Estates Surveyor's Department was one of the strongest and most autonomous in the authority. Not only did it have the specialist professional functions of land valuation, purchase and sale, but it was generating non-rate income, which could be re-invested by the Department without the pressures generally faced by rate-borne expenditure. Its independent role in the land market also meant that the Department's officers were able to develop close relations with the private sector property sector in the city. One practical result of this rather specialist position was the authority's emphasis on the provision of serviced land rather than the construction and refurbishment of industrial

premises. Since there was effective demand from the private sector and - until the end of the decade - Sheffield seemed reasonably prosperous, the officers of the Estates Surveyor's Department saw "no reason to become heavily involved in factory-building already being carried out effectively by private developers" (Johnson and Cochrane 1981, p. 46).

The Estates Surveyor's Department was the mainstream department with specific responsibility for the council's economic development work, and the professional values (or prejudices) of the Department helped to shape that work. As valuers, the dominant view which the Department's officers took of their land development work was a commercial one. Their training encouraged them to assess market values of property, to purchase land cheaply and dispose of it at higher cost. Their task, as they saw it, was to build up a portfolio of land for the council which was capable of generating income and making capital gains, as well as ensuring that the council had the land it needed for its own purposes, although few other departments were making significant demands for additional space or premises. In all their work, considerations of employment growth remained secondary. In the late 1970s one of the Department's main concerns was to find ways around the Community Land Act (introduced by a Labour government) and, although Sheffield was Labour controlled, it was

encouraged to do so by an equally commercially oriented Corporate Estates Committee.

Within the council's organisational hierarchy, Sheffield's Industrial Development Officer (IDO) was based within the Estates Surveyor's Department, and responsible to the Corporate Estates Committee. But his office location was physically separate from the bulk of council offices, even if only across the road, above some shops and other offices in Palatine Chambers (where a much expanded Department of Employment and Economic Development was still located at the start of the 1990s). This was part of an attempt still further to emphasise the commercial nature of his activities and their separation from the normal work of the local authority. It is possible to see this separation as largely cosmetic, intended to obscure the relationship between IDO and council and present a sympathetic front to potential developers. But it was suggested by senior officers of the council, that the significance of the separation was greater than this, to the extent that the IDO was felt to have a rather unusual position. He had been given a budget, information about available land and premises and a brief from the Council, but was then expected largely to get on with his job, without referring to others in the officer hierarchy. According to this argument, an IDO needed to be able to respond quickly to

the enquiries and demands of industrialists and developers, without extensive involvement with council bureaucracy, which was likely to slow down decision-making.

In the late 1970s the IDO then in post saw one of his tasks to be the representation of commercial interests within what they (and he) thought was a largely unsympathetic local authority. On the basis of interviews with the IDO and others within the authority at this time, it was possible to summarise the position as follows: "To a large extent the IDO attempts to distance himself from the rest of the local authority and puts the case for developers within the authority. In so doing, he may antagonise the Planning Section. The Estates' Surveyor sees one of his jobs as the protection of the IDO from the rest of the authority so that he can continue to take an independent approach without being hidebound by the usual caution of local authorities" (Cochrane 1979). The organisational position of the IDO confirmed the ambiguity of the industrial development role within the council, since it implied the need to have an officer whose role was to (independently) advise his 'clients' (essentially defined as commercial and property interests) on ways of evading rules imposed by other parts of the council. In this context the main responsibility of the IDO was accepted as being to engender close links with developers and the

private sector in order to generate employment, prosperity and and diversification (George 1981).

No one council committee had responsibility for economic development work. Although the IDO was responsible through the Estates Surveyor's Department to the Corporate Estates Committee, industrial development was a relatively small part of the Department's responsibilities and, therefore, also marginal to the Committee's concerns. In addition, the council's promotional activities - including those handled by the IDO - came under the City Promotion Committee. For this committee, too, the work of the IDO was only a part of its interests, and its members were more concerned with the campaigns themselves than with their results in terms of employment or investment. Finally, there was a third more specialist committee - the Industrial Development Advisory Committee - which reported back to the Promotion committee. But as its name implies, this was purely an advisory committee, made up not only of councillors from the Promotion Committee, but also of local MPs, regional departments of government, representatives of local employers and trade unions. Reports were made to this committee, but it was explicitly intended to be a forum for discussion, gathering information and ideas from actors in the local economy. It was not a decision-making

body.

The practice of the IDO was largely opportunistic and commercially oriented (in line with the dominant style identified by Boddy 1982. See also Cochrane 1983). He saw his role as marketing the land and premises on offer, passing on enquiries to other estate agencies if there was no suitable council owned property, and encouraging almost any potential development. The role of the IDO, however, was not solely a responsive one. On the contrary it included the responsibility of actively seeking out enquiries and encouraging inward investment. In that sense, at least, Sheffield's economic policy was already 'proactive' in the ways which Cooke sees as characteristic of local government in the post Fordist period (Cooke 1989; see also Hirst and Zeitlin 1989). The IDO worked closely with the publicity department (organisationally within the Chief Executive's department) in developing promotional and advertising campaigns. In the late 1970s, the IDO's own budget for promotion (excluding staff, administrative costs and capital spending) was £36,000 and a similar sum was spent on related activity by the publicity department. The main stated aims of the various campaigns were to encourage inward investment (particularly by 'modern' industry and offices) and to encourage orders for existing Sheffield industry. The council published its own quarterly journal

intended for potential developers ('Development Sheffield'), as well as advertising in journals such as 'Trade and Industry' and organising touring exhibitions to the South-East of England, West Germany (Baden-Württemberg) and even the West Coast of the USA.

Promotion and advertising sought to change the image of Sheffield as a grimy industrial city. It emphasised the success of the Clean Air campaign launched by Ron Ironmonger in the 1960s and stressed the ease of access to the surrounding countryside -Sheffield's 'golden frame' - both for residents of the city and for commuters who might chose to live in the countryside and work in the city. One promotional pamphlet eulogised :
"Where once its reputation rested fairly and squarely on steel and cutlery alone, today it enjoys a fine reputation as a thriving conference and tourist centre, a booming regional office centre, and a clean and beautiful city with many acres of fine parks and gardens... Gone are the dark, industrial skies of yesteryear, swept away by a ruthless 13 year clean air programme that turned one of the dirtiest industrial cities in the world into one of the cleanest industrial cities in Europe" (Sheffield City Promotion Committee, undated, p.5). This approach was central to the strategy of attracting white collar service employment to the city, and was directed particularly towards persuading white collar workers and executives of the benefits of

such a move. Its appropriateness seemed confirmed in the mid 1970s when first the Midland Bank's International Office and then the Manpower Services Commission moved to Sheffield. Sheffield was promoted as "Office Centre of the North" (Sheffield City Promotion Committee 1977). Despite a reputation for rigidity, the city's planning department continued to permit speculative office development, even as other authorities were imposing new restrictions.

The politics underlying these policies were uncertain. As expressed in the official language of the Council (see, e.g., City of Sheffield MDC 1977b) they were based on a desire to reduce unemployment and create jobs - a powerful discourse difficult to challenge in an industrial city such as Sheffield . But there was little serious attempt to assess the success of the policies in achieving such ambitions. In 1977 the council's publicity officer described the promotional activities as "casting bread on the water and hoping it comes back as buttered toast", but it was unclear how that 'buttered toast' was to be identified. Instead, the measures which were adopted in committee reports concentrated on noting a high degree of frenetic activity, with statistics about contacts made, industrial sites let or sold and numbers employed in them. The councils's own glossy publicity material was accepted as an indicator of success. It may or may not have

persuaded developers but it certainly seemed to convince councillors. And until the late 1970s, such an interpretation was easy to accept, in part because the fears of large scale decline were not realised until the turn of the decade. Sheffield's economy remained strong, and, not surprisingly, the council's economic development work was given credit. It was widely believed that it was "large and successful" (Chandler and Templeton 1981, p. 11).

But it may be more appropriate to view the politics of economic development at this time as largely symbolic: the problem of industrial decline having been identified, the council had to be seen to be responding to it. The publicity material and the high level of activity appears to have been more important than anything which was achieved in terms of investment or employment, since little attempt was made to measure these.

The symbolic importance of the politics was also apparent in other ways. It highlighted the attempt to build relationships with the local business community. The trip to the U.S.A. (in 1977) was undertaken in collaboration with the local Chamber of Commerce, and was also intended to encourage U.S. orders for Sheffield products. It was followed up with seminars for local businessmen, and the Industrial Development Office

retained consultants in Japan and California whose task was to seek out potential investors and to advise Sheffield based firms on market potential. The council also participated in special exhibitions highlighting the value of goods produced in Sheffield (e.g. at Interidex in Basle in 1978) and helping firms to exhibit at trade fairs. The Industrial Development Advisory Committee was the institutional expression of this politics, allowing access to business interests but with little direct power or influence. The Promotion Committee too had a largely symbolic role, with little effective political power. It was one to which less active yet respected - usually older - councillors were allocated. It generated a high level of ceremonial activity, with frequent attendance by its members at ceremonial functions, but, as with the position of Lord Mayor, the emphasis on ceremony effectively confirmed a lack of political power.

Despite the symbolism, however, there was little direct involvement of business with local government, even in this policy area. Instead officers and elected politicians were largely left to make their own assessment of what private developers and local employers wanted and then seek to provide them. That helps to explain the role of the IDO in speaking for commercial interest within the authority. In a sense it was necessary for the council to generate its own pressures to show externally

that it was sympathetic to development. Whilst the local Chamber of Commerce was prepared to work alongside the council on specific issues, its main response to the council remained one which stressed the need to reduce rate levels and planning restrictions. The main relationships between the IDO and industry were with individual 'clients'. There was little perceived need from business for continuing relationships with business interests, through the Chamber of Commerce or other agency (see, e.g., Johnson and Cochrane 1981, pp 93-4). The symbols of co-operation were enough from the council's point of view, particularly for the officers most directly involved, who were able to use their links with the private sector to justify initiatives which moved outside of the usual rules of hierarchical decision-making.

Despite generalised support for it, economic development was not at the centre of municipal labourist politics with their emphasis on the delivery of the local services of the welfare state. In practice the work of industrial development was left to the expert officers, and on the officer side it was largely managed through a relationship between professionals in the IDO and the Publicity department. This was not extensively formalised, but partly the result of individual negotiations between officers and partly the result of informed calculations by the officers

concerned about which budgets they could draw on to cover the costs of their activities. They were able to manipulate the rather confusing organisational and financial structure to maximise their own budgets. Although economic development work was the product of cross-departmental co-operation, it was not an explicitly corporate activity. There was no clear-cut authority wide policy bringing the departments together. Its operation and development were largely left to the decision-making of a small group of (three) key officers. The council's economic development work fitted well into the dominant structures bequeathed by the past (these relationships are summarised in Cochrane 1979).

Towards the end of the 1970s and into the 1980s the old methods were beginning to be undermined, although not yet in any dramatic way. Other officers began to be involved, and there were hints of a wider focus for economic policy-making. An early example of this is to be found in the attempt - in cooperation with the South Yorkshire County Council and representatives of the industry - to support the city's cutlery industry, which was felt to be under pressure from foreign imports. Joint delegations were organised to London to put pressure on the Labour government for the imposition of import controls. Although the initiative

faded in the wake of the election of a Conservative government in 1979 (because it was assumed that the council would not be able to influence the Thatcher government) the significance of the campaign for the council went beyond this. It drew in officers outside the usual limited range - particularly from the planning department and the Corporate Management Unit (CMU) within the Chief Executive's Office. There were signs of a greater corporate interest in the area, and leading politicians were also involved for the first time.

A different understanding of what intervention in the local economy might mean was beginning to develop. A sectoral analysis of the cutlery industry and its role in the local economy was prepared (City of Sheffield MDC 1977a) and the council was becoming directly involved with local employers and trade unionists in developing industrial policy. Indeed the main drive for council involvement came from the Trades Council, rather than the council machinery. At the same time, however, changes were also taking place within the the city council. The vice chair of the Promotion Committee was one of the new breed of councillors - Clive Betts, later Chair of Housing, and, by the late 1980s, Leader of the Council - then also a white collar employee of South Yorkshire County Council. He worked in close cooperation with officers in the CMU and was prepared to become

more involved in the day to day work of the authority, moving away from the model which stressed delegation from councillor (and chair) to officers (see Chandler and Templeton 1981 for a detailed discussion of Sheffield's involvement in the campaign). Because the existing structure of economic development work in Sheffield did not encourage intervention of this sort, Betts and the CMU effectively had to bypass them.

The move towards wider definitions of economic development work continued, appearing in discussions of other policy areas, since it was becoming increasingly clear that success in some of these relied on economic prosperity. For example, an attempt was made to raise questions about the local economy in a corporately organised report arising from the Council's bid for Inner City Partnership status in 1978-9 (City of Sheffield MDC, undated). Within the Industrial Development Office, the main practical change was the creation of a small section to offer direct assistance to small firms, through small loans and grants. An Employment Forum was set up to bring together employers, unions and council in developing new employment policies. The council also supported the setting up and funding of an independent Co-operative Development Group, intended to generate new enterprises in the form of worker co-operatives. The costs involved were modest, and the changes were not dramatic, but

they began to challenge the view that the supply of land and sympathy towards developers would themselves generate growth and create jobs. Instead they implied that some rather more direct form of intervention was required. Previously the council had set its face against any forms of subsidy to industry or development: it was concerned to manage its portfolio of property in a commercially successful way and, almost incidentally, to create jobs. Now it was being acknowledged that such an approach was inadequate.

11.2 The new economics

When the new political leadership came to power in 1980 change was already underway, but the existing structures of the council and of economic development, in particular, remained virtually intact. The development of new policies meant challenging these structures, in the context of dramatic economic change at local level, upheavals in the Labour Party and the power of the 'new right' in national government. Local pressures for change were also strong, particularly from organisations such as the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions and the Trades Council, which employed its own researcher in the early 1980s to

highlight the problems of local industry (see, e.g., Sheffield Trades Council 1982).

If there was a general lack of clarity about the programmatic details of the socialism which had been espoused by Sheffield's leading councillors at the start of the 1980s (see Ch. 10), that was particularly so in the economic policy field. David Blunkett had made it clear early on what he did not want, namely Sheffield's past practice, which he described in 1981, in a speech to the Trades Council's Employment Sub-committee as "grovelling on our knees" to any industrialist who is prepared to come to Sheffield to provide jobs, whatever the product" (quoted in Green 1981, p.3). But it was less clear what the alternative might be, which was one of the reasons for the setting up of the strategy group referred to earlier, and the appointment of strategy officers. In a review of the first year's work of these officers, it was acknowledged that: "From the start the councillors recognised that there was no clear path to an agreed set of objectives; indeed there was some confusion on how to translate political principles into effective action" (City of Sheffield 1983, p. 1).

Nevertheless, it was also clear that the development of a 'socialist' economic policy was a high priority for the council, and that this was to be one of the key elements of the new politics, essential if, "a truly socialist

society is to be created by the people rather than the long held paternalistic pretence that it can be done for them" (Blunkett 1981a, p. 1, based on an internal Council discussion document on 'Implementing a local economic strategy for Sheffield' prepared in 1980). Here the link between local and national debates for the 'soul' of the Labour Party are well articulated. Blunkett stresses the need for a reorientation of Labour's national policy in a "battle to talk about the genuine democratic control of total national resources", but also looks to the development of local programmes able to point in this direction, through "genuine alternative economic policies fostered and supported by the resources available at local level and bridging the gap between the provision of services and the industrial manufacturing sector in local communities" (Blunkett 1981a, p. 1). The arguments were developed not only as suitable for Sheffield but of wider relevance to left controlled councils, and with this in mind were presented to a conference of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities (see also Blunkett 1982b).

The connection with the policies of other authorities, being developed at the same time is clear from this discussion document. Many of the ideas expressed and policies proposed are familiar from those raised elsewhere (see, e.g., Cochrane 1986b). First, the direct influence of councils is

identified, not only in terms of employment and purchasing power, but also of community and other infrastructure (including education, training and public transport); secondly, support is expressed for intervention into processes of industrial and economic regeneration in order to achieve a "wide ranging programme for industrial democracy" (p.2), and to encourage the development of "socially and economically worth-while" ventures, on the basis of community and worker involvement. A range of methods of intervention is briefly considered, although without attempt to prioritise or choose between them. The need for new products and resources to produce them may, it is suggested, be identified by local workers and residents. The confident embracing of municipal enterprise is perhaps unusual. Again Sheffield's new initiatives are firmly linked back to past traditions of local government municipal enterprise: "The examples of municipal enterprise of the past could now become updated to the community enterprises of the present day. Major national undertakings now taken for granted, were the innovatory child of 19th and early 20th century Local Government. That pioneering spirit, driving force and genuine foresight, have been blanketed and pigeon-holed in a world where energy and enthusiasm is suspected as a threat to stability, and the radical lifting of horizons is dubbed as extremist divergence from the consensus" (p. 3).

But co-operative development is also supported, as is the need for partnership between the public and private sectors (and between different parts of the public sector). Blunkett points to the opportunities which might arise from the setting up of local enterprise boards, with "planning agreements and the full involvement of Trade Unions, community and Central Government itself" (p. 3). With a socialist government at national level, Blunkett offers the hope of an integrated and decentralised system of economic planning and development.

The search for ways of translating these general hopes for change into some sort of practice continued through 1980 and 1981. The continued lack of certainty was reflected in the decision, despite some misgivings, to proceed with a bid to central government for the allocation of an Enterprise Zone to be sited in the Lower Don Valley. The council leadership was unable to persuade the majority of the Labour Group that such a bid would not be worthwhile. However, conditions were attached to the bid - on planning controls and a continued role for the local authority within the zone - which were widely believed to make its rejection a foregone conclusion, particularly within the business community (this was confirmed in interview with the director of the Sheffield Chamber of Commerce and others in 1983). The bid was duly dismissed by the

Secretary of State for the Environment in February, 1981. It looked as if the council leadership's political position meant it was clear what it did not want, but less clear about the possibility of positive initiatives.

A visit by a group of councillors and officers (as well as Keith Jackson, from Northern College) to the Mondragon Co-operatives in Northern Spain was influential at this stage, because of their commitment to local initiatives, linking production, demand and investment. Mondragon appeared to combine the main features which underlay the leadership's hopes for an economic policy, both as the basis of a wider model and as an immediate guide for Sheffield: it was rooted in a particular community and allowed the feeding back of profits into that community, as well as encouraging successful job creation in productive rather than retail or distributive industries (17000 jobs over 25 years), and implying more democratic work organisation and possibilities of socially useful production. It offered a successful morality, which combined self-help with the maintenance of a strong local community (Blunkett and Green 1983, p. 17). Some doubts were expressed about the appropriateness of a model which prospered through the Franco period (see, for example, arguments quoted by Alcock and Lee 1981, p. 91) and questions were raised about the extent to which co-operatives could "survive in a sea of

capitalism, coalesce to help build a viable alternative economic system" (Green, G. 1981, p. 3). But one of the first initiatives of the new leadership was to support the setting up of the (autonomous, but council supported and largely council financed) Sheffield Co-operative Development Group (SCDG). Co-operatives were seen as being central parts of an alternative to 'capitalist-oriented' economic development policies, such as those adopted by Birmingham while under Conservative control in the early 1980s (see Green, G. 1981).

At first the process of change seemed piecemeal and modest. The Estates Surveyor's Department continued to market industrial land. In April 1981 a unit (Sheffield Enterprises) was set up to allow financial aid to be given to firms seeking support or investment, on the basis of what was called an 'open door' policy, that is applications were invited and each was considered on its merits. Sheffield Enterprises can be seen as a half-hearted move towards new policies, but still consistent with the attitudes of the past, so that finance was seen as another form of infrastructural support to the private sector, in much the same way as land and premises had been in the past. The main break with the policies of the past did not take place until the setting up of first an Employment Committee (May 1981) and then an Employment Department in 1981/2. It

was at that point that choices began to be made about policy direction, largely expressed in the choice made for the new Employment Coordinator, in September 1981. In a paradoxical echo of past traditions, it was to be the officers who were to develop policy, with the support of politicians. Sheffield's new initiatives found their main initial expression not in clear policy proposals, but in organisational changes. It was these which were proudly identified as innovative by the council - "Sheffield is one of the first local authorities to set up an Employment Committee and Department", began the advertisement for posts to staff the Department (City of Sheffield 1982a). And many outside commentators also identified this as Sheffield's distinguishing feature. Grayson began an article in similar vein: "Sheffield City Council is the first local authority in the UK (perhaps in Europe) to create an Employment Committee and an Employment Department" (Grayson 1983, p. 22).

The significance of setting up an independent department with associated committee was a measure of the political priority given to the policy area, and an indication that leading councillors felt that existing structures were not appropriate for launching new initiatives. Organisational changes were needed if new possibilities were to be realised. Past experience had shown that locating economic development

within the Estates Surveyor's department had reinforced a property led approach, and links to the Publicity Department had encouraged crude forms of external marketing. But locating economic development within the Chief Executive's area of responsibility was also rejected, largely because the Chief Executive was weak within a strong departmental system. David Blunkett argued that the creation of a new department was intended to undermine existing bureaucratic structures, and avoid creating new ones: "in the past bureaucracy has tended to dominate decisions. What we are talking about is possible ways of doing things, **not** just a creation of jobs but rather how you could do it differently". He argued that another of the tasks of the department was to challenge how local government officers saw themselves, and, in particular, to question the view that their task was to explain why certain actions cannot be taken, which he described as part of the local government tradition of professions. One of the department's tasks, he said, was to help shift officers away from the notion that they were servicing the council and its committees to one in which they saw themselves as "servicing the community" (Interview 12th April 1983).

The Employment Committee's overall responsibilities remained very broadly focused and allowed significant scope for policy development. They

were to "co-ordinate everything that the city Council can do:

- a) to prevent further loss of jobs in the city;
- b) to alleviate the worst effects of unemployment, and to encourage effective training for new skills and jobs;
- c) to stimulate new investment, to create new kinds of employment, and to diversify job opportunities in the city;
- d) to explore new forms of industrial democracy and co-operative control over work" (City of Sheffield Employment Department 1983, p. 1). The gaps still needed to be filled in, and that was to be the task of the new officers, supervised by the committee. It was hoped that strategy would emerge from a package of activities covering all potential aspects of local authority intervention.

Applicants for the post of Employment Coordinator were expected to produce answers to four questions in no more than one thousand words each: how to promote the prosperity of the city without enriching one section at the expense of another; how the council could constructively respond to conflict between the owners and workers in the engineering and steel industries in response to slim down and closure; whether the council could create new jobs on a scale to compensate for the effect of recession and how much effort it would take to stop redundancies in the short term;

how traditional economic development could best be integrated into the new initiatives and what new relationships, units and resources would be required. Each was also sent a copy of David Blunkett's paper on alternative economic policies to which reference has already been made (Blunkett 1981a).

It will be clear from this that the person appointed to the post was expected to be largely in sympathy with the ambitions of the council leadership. Applicants were expected to be "committed to the Council's approach and policies". The Conservative group on the Council included this post among those defined as 'political' which would be under threat if they took control of the council ('The Star' 20/6/81). This was not a traditional local authority chief officer appointment, in which the chief officer was expected to work within guidelines (and statutory responsibilities) developed over many years. Nor was there an existing clearly defined department to manage. The dominant policies of the past were effectively being rejected, and a new path chosen. But the significance of this went beyond the search for a politically sympathetic officer. The hope was that the person appointed would effectively develop the new policies, to produce a coherent strategy for intervention into the local economy.

The job description was wide enough to allow for the development of

policy in many different directions. It included the following duties and responsibilities: to attract and promote new industrial and commercial development and to take action to ensure the stability and success of existing industry and commerce; to "assist the Employment Committee" on approaches for advice and financial assistance from enterprises and potential enterprises; to encourage the development of cooperatives and to work towards setting up a local enterprise board with a system of planning agreements; to develop municipal enterprise (although without responsibility for running it on a day to day basis) and to secure employment in the public sector; to ensure adequate training for skilled workers, to meet the future needs of industry and commerce; to coordinate measures to alleviate unemployment, including Manpower Services Commission schemes. It did **not** include any commitment to the development of equal opportunity policies either inside the council or in those areas in which it intervened (Sheffield City Council 1981a).

The initiative of councillors succeeded in raising the profile of economic policy, by creating a separate department and making it the responsibility of a full council committee with a chair on the Policy Committee, but it was the appointment of a chief officer and the operation of the new department which was effectively to shape the direction of

Sheffield's new local economic policies in its early years. Sheffield's employment policy was driven as much by the officers appointed to the new department as by the local Labour Party or the councillors on the Employment Committee. The key decision was made in the appointment of the first Employment Coordinator. Here the choice was relatively clear: between appointing someone with experience inside the council, and within Sheffield Enterprises, or appointing someone from outside, with a record in community organisation who had made a critical contribution to debates about local government organisation and past industrial policies. It was a choice between a candidate likely to develop existing work in the direction favoured by councillors, starting from an existing economic development base, expanding financial provision to the private sector, and being able to show success in terms of buildings, jobs created etc., and a candidate whose political commitment was clear and who stressed the need to challenge existing council procedures and hierarchies. It was the choice between a practitioner, produced by the local government system, and a visionary, committed to challenging it. The decision was a close one, and - according to one senior Labour politician - the chair of the Employment Committee (Bill Michie) was in a minority on the appointment panel. But the person finally appointed was the visionary, John Benington, who had

previously written a critique of corporate planning in local government (Benington 1976), had been involved in the preparation of critiques of past industrial policies (Joint Trades Councils 1980) and in attempts to present and develop the ideas of popular planning arising out of the Lucas experience (Wainwright and Elliott 1982).

He came from a similar background to and had previously worked with the two strategy officers appointed earlier. Like them, his role was not to be restricted to the work of one department, but was to influence the operation of the council as a whole. It might not have been possible to challenge the existing structures of the council head on, but it was possible to use new officers and a new department to begin to undermine their position. The Employment Coordinator was expected to work closely with other chief officers and to be able to call on the resources of their departments. He and the new officers appointed by him were expected to carry politics into the heart of the Town Hall bureaucracy to shake up existing arrangements, even if it was not always clear what the effect of that shake up was likely to be. The tensions of developing a new policy area were reflected in the splits, divisions and arguments within the new department: that was where the main debates on economic policy took place, as organisational divisions were translated into policy distinctions.

The obstacles to the developing policy existed not only in the harsh economic realities of the world into which the department sought to intervene, but also within the council machinery - in relationships with other departments and officers in other departments as much as with councillors and alternative political perspectives within the council or represented in local parties. It is to these issues of professional and organisational politics that we shall turn in the next chapter.

Notes

1. Most of the material in section 11.1 is drawn from a series of interviews undertaken in 1977-79 and summarised in a case study, whose empirical content was discussed and agreed with relevant officers of Sheffield City Council.
2. Interview with David Blunkett, 12/4/83.

Chapter 12. Sheffield: developing a new politics of economic development

12.1 The role of the new professionals

As indicated in previous chapters, the initiative for political change came from within the Labour group of the City Council, but was also influenced by their links into the local Labour Party and trade union movement. The context for change at the start of the 1980s was set by the wider economic experience of deindustrialisation and recession and by the political crisis of social democracy which left the Labour Party sharply divided over its future direction, encouraging the development of challenges to old orthodoxies and leaderships (see Chapter 6 above). In some respects, Sheffield's new political leadership can be seen as the local expression of these more general shifts, but it was clearly also the expression of specific local processes of interaction, between economy and politics, and within the local political system. The importance of understanding the independent (one hesitates to use the term 'relatively autonomous', if only because it has been devalued in debates in which it has been sprayed on as an afterthought to avoid accusations of economic

determinism) weight of politics is emphasised by considering the next stage of development.

The initiative for change may have come from local political leaders, rooted in the official institutions of local government and linked to those of the trade union movement, but at the start of the 1980s the politics of economic development in Sheffield were increasingly dominated in practice by a new set of professionals. The council leadership consciously used existing structures to insert more sympathetic officers into the system. The model adopted for achieving this insertion was the relatively straightforward one of imitating those structures. The use of a departmental model reflected the traditional view that only a department with its own committee would have the necessary status to initiate change. It also meant that there was no need to rely on existing officers or departments whose support might be equivocal. Existing chief officers also supported this approach because setting up a new department made it possible to avoid squabbling between existing departments for responsibility, and avoided the danger that additional power would be placed in the hands of the Chief Executive. Existing structures remained intact. In interviews several chief officers expressed scepticism about the likely success of the new initiatives and were reluctant to be too closely

associated with them. And there was a marked reluctance to take on an activity with such a high political profile because one consequence might also be increased political interference (this was a particular concern of the Estates Surveyor, who had previously had the main responsibility for economic development work).

By the end of March 1982 the new department had taken on many of the features of most departments within local government: it had its own chief officer (albeit with the title Employment Coordinator rather than Director) with a seat on Management Team, its own committee, its own budget and now also its own staff. Although still small by the standards of other departments (with a budget of less than 1% of the council's overall expenditure) it had a high political profile because its new staff were concerned with policy development rather than service delivery. The influence of the newly appointed professionals was clear from the start, and soon helped to shape the programmes of the politicians.

An important feature of this early period of 'local socialism' in Sheffield was the extent to which the new politics became the property of a particular set of officers, rather than any locally based groups. John Benington has stressed the extent to which he was able to change the priorities of the council. Any lingering ambitions to recreate a working

class in the image of Attercliffe by assisting industrial investment were soon left behind. He later described the situation which faced him on arrival as follows: "the first aim [of the councillors] was to use their powers under Section 137 of the Local Government Act to back up initiatives by local people who were facing employment problems. By the time I arrived there was a queue of 300 local enterprises waiting for grants, loans or other kinds of practical help. In my interview I argued strongly that such a strategy could very easily produce a kind of bottomless pit as they could get completely overwhelmed with emergency firefighting and industrial casework. Consequently, there had to be a different kind of strategy - a longer term strategy...They originally saw the department as being a very small unit of people to analyse the applications for finance and get the money out. From the beginning I argued that if the department was to have this wider programme of work including vital dimensions like equal opportunities for women it would need to be much larger and would need a staff of about 40. At the time that wasn't agreed, but my predictions have proved about right. We have got the range of work that I wanted and about 50 staff have been struggling for the first few years to see if it is possible to shift away from fire-fighting casework to something more strategic" (Alcock et al 1984, p.71). The

gradual move away from the 'open door' policy which characterised the early development of Sheffield Enterprises was led by the officers and later endorsed by the Employment Committee in 1983.

The division of labour between elected politicians and new officers was never explicitly stated, but sometimes resulted in significant conflicts. The most important of these clustered around forms of direct intervention into the private sector. Here officers tended to be more sceptical about the possibilities of success than did elected politicians. As Chandler and Lawless noted at the time, although the Employment Department did "provide funds for co-operatives and conventionally owned private businesses many of its members are far from convinced that they should be involved in subsidising the private sector" (Chandler and Lawless 1985, p. 259). In practice the arguments of the officers tended to be successful in particular cases - for example, over potential investments in firms such as Viners, GP Wincott and Manganese Steel - but they were not always accepted with good grace, since there was frequently a concern that the conditions being imposed by the Department in negotiation were too hard, leading firms to withdraw for one reason or another.

In the case of Viners (a struggling cutlery company), for example, the Department supported proposals for a buy back from its parent company on

the basis of a planning and employment agreement, but was accused of dragging its feet and looking for guarantees to the extent that banks withdrew their support, forcing the company into liquidation in 1983 (see also discussion in Goodwin 1986). Although the officially stated position was that nothing else could have been done - because the company was too weak to save - some councillors were concerned that whenever a major scheme to save jobs seemed possible, the officers were too reluctant to become involved (whether from a belief that becoming too close to the private sector would be politically compromising, or because it was felt that investment in failing companies was unlikely to bring worthwhile returns in terms of employment or continued production). In the case of Manganese Steel these concerns came out rather more clearly. In 1982, Manganese Steel was faced with closure, and, as a result the City Council waived the rent which was due and asked Hadfields to act as guarantor. In 1983, Hadfields itself faced threat of closure and withdrew support for Manganese Steel. A liquidator was brought in, and the company's workers formulated a rescue plan, dependent on Council support. The Employment Department and the Employment Committee both decided that they could not support the plan. A full meeting of the Labour Group, however, overturned this decision, arguing for support. Only after pressure from

officers and politicians associated with the Department was this change of position first postponed and later rejected. Manganese Steel closed. Again, the economic logic of the Department's position was reluctantly accepted, but at some cost to the Department's political credibility (again, see also Goodwin 1986). These concerns among elected Labour politicians also found a practical expression in their attitudes to policies developed for the Lower Don Valley, which are discussed in more detail in Chapter 13.

Sheffield's political leadership remained a strong and centralised one, even after the council's move to the left at the start of the 1980s. Leading councillors continued to see themselves as directing the work of the authority, and in terms of economic policy that meant that they saw themselves as laying out the broad policy direction and being involved in detailed decisions on finance for particular projects. But, it was also recognised that developing the new economic strategy was a task for the new officers: that was one of the reasons for the political sensitivity of the appointments, particularly that of Employment Coordinator. The extent to which the Employment Coordinator made political statements outside the confines of papers presented to council committees (e.g. Alcock et al 1984) was a measure of the change, in the sense that his *political* role was acknowledged, however uneasily, within the council system (Benington

later confirmed that the interview, published as Alcock et al 1984, had generated concern from some - unnamed - senior councillors although he had already amended the original interview transcript to avoid the criticism that he was making policy without consulting councillors or that he was himself going too far in commenting on individual councillors)¹.

The difficulties associated with this development, however, were also apparent in rather uneasy jokes made by some councillors about the reversal of roles they identified, to the extent that they now felt themselves to be implementing policy while the new officers were left to develop them². David Blunkett, whilst stressing the value of bringing in people from outside to challenge the way in which local government officers saw themselves, also suggested that some would be better off as elected politicians rather than officers.

12.2 Identifying the new professionals

The new officers were appointed as part of an attempt to break with more traditional forms of economic development work and of local government bureaucracy. As a result, apart from those seconded from other parts of the authority, many of them were appointed from outside local

government. This can be seen clearly in the backgrounds of the Principal Development Officers who were appointed to senior positions within the department. The officer with most experience of local government had, like Benington, worked for a Community Development Project, before being employed within a local authority for a short time. Another had academic experience and had worked with a trades council as a researcher; a third had been working in a University, but had previously spent several years in Tanzania working on economic development plans. The only woman appointed at this stage (to the equal opportunities post) had experience in the local women's movement. Later additions to the core of senior staff included one initially appointed to another post within the department, whose main experience was as an accountant in the private sector and had also undertaken research for the local trades council, and another (also initially appointed to another position) who had been secretary of the Lucas Aerospace Combine Committee, which had prepared an alternative corporate plan for the company and inspired many of the economic initiatives launched by left councils in the early 1980s (see, e.g., Wainwright and Elliott 1982). The secondment of Paul Skelton to the department from his position as Principal Strategy Officer brought another senior member with Community Development Project and voluntary sector

experience.

In his discussion of the 'new urban left' Gyford is careful not to suggest that it was a formal organised grouping. Instead he stresses that it is almost "amoeba-like in its lack of any one constant pattern of organisation" (Gyford 1985, p.17). Similarly he points out that there was no unified or coherent programme of 'local socialism' shared by its supporters or members of the 'new urban left'. The importance of these conclusions becomes clear in this context. The new professionals could all be seen to have been members of the 'new urban left'. They had experience of and had - mainly - been active in the movements and developing the ideas identified by Gyford as part of the move to 'local socialism' (Gyford 1985, pp. 33-42). Many of them had cut their political teeth on community action, had been influenced by the associated debates about the local state, as well as being involved in or influenced by critiques of traditional Labourism and forms of economic intervention (for example, as represented in 'Beyond the Fragments', but also in the critiques of Labour's industrial policy, expressed in reports such as 'State Intervention in Industry', in the preparation of which some of the new officers had been involved) (Rowbotham et al 1979, and Joint Trades Councils 1980). In a sense, building on Rhodes (1988), the new professionals could be seen as

members of embryonic policy networks.

The 'new urban left', as described by Boddy and Fudge (1984a), Gyford (1985), Lansley et al (1989), was a 'left' of activists and professionals, into which those employed in Sheffield fitted well. The "amoeba-like grouping" identified by Gyford already allowed for formal and informal linkages, and these were developed further in the course of the 1980s as the radical professionals became integrated into the institutions of the local state, through regular meetings between officers and councillors on specific issues, a blossoming of courses from a range of educational institutions, and later (1985) the setting up of the Centre for Local Economic Strategies. The new policy network did not have access to any influence at the centre of British politics, but it did generate a wider policy community within which ideas could be discussed, attempts could be made to identify best practice and support networks developed.

The most obvious linkages in the early appointments in Sheffield were through Community Development Project (CDP) experience. The influence of the CDPs on the 'new urban left' have been widely stated (e.g. Gyford 1985, pp. 34-36. See Loney 1983, for a discussion of the CDPs and their development) but it is more difficult to trace any direct influence. In the case of Sheffield in the early 1980s, it is almost too easy - at least in

terms of personnel - since those with CDP experience included the two Principal Strategy Officers, the new Employment Coordinator, one of the Principal Officers, and several of those appointed at lower levels. Keith Jackson who seems to have influenced an earlier period of policy development had also worked for one of the Projects.

The Community Development Projects were set up in twelve inner city and older industrial areas of Great Britain in the late 1960s and early 1970s as part of the U.K.'s Urban Programme, 75% funded by the Home Office and 25% by local authorities. Each interdisciplinary team included researchers employed by a University or Polytechnic, and action workers employed by the local authorities, and was supervised by a council (and councillor) based management committee. The aim of the projects was to encourage developments at local - community - level which could then usefully be generalised throughout Britain's inner cities. According to the Home Office, the programme was "a neighbourhood-based experiment aimed at finding new ways of meeting the needs of people living in areas of high social deprivation; by bringing together the work of all the social services under the leadership of a special project team and also tapping resources of self help and mutual help which may exist among the people in the neighborhoods" (press release 16th July 1969, quoted in CDP 1977b, p. 12).

A key objective of the CDPs was to "take some of the load off the statutory services by generating a fund of voluntary social welfare activity and mutual help amongst the individuals, families and social groups in the neighbourhood, supported by the voluntary agencies" (CDP: Objectives and Strategies, 1970, quoted in CDP 1977b, p. 60).

In practice, however, most of the Projects worked rather differently. The two sides of the teams tended to work together, with the action/research distinction becoming blurred, and, more important the underlying principles of the initiative were soon being called into question. In particular, the notion that community action could solve the problems of inner cities was challenged, both because it was concluded that the economic state of the inner cities was largely a consequence of wider forms of national (and global) economic restructuring (CDP 1977a) and because effective community work tended to encourage increased expectations and demands at local level, rather than (or as much as) an increase in voluntary welfare activity. It was argued that only by challenging the basic assumptions of what came to be called the British Poverty Programme could progress be made (CDP 1977b).

But there were also legacies of the Projects which were immediately relevant to the tasks of the early 1980s, working within the institutions

of local government. One shared feature of many of the Community Development Projects was the balancing act their employees had to perform to sustain relationships with their management committees and the Home Office, whilst also supporting community based organisations which tended directly to challenge Council departments - particularly Housing Departments - or to place increasing demands on them for financial support. The marxist inspired reports prepared by many of the projects also fitted uneasily with the views of their sponsors. Yet, most of the Projects (Batley, Southwark and Cleator Moor were exceptions) survived their five year life, despite threats of closure from one sponsor or the other. The CDPs could be seen as a dry run for models of change, albeit this time with a greater certainty of support from within the political machinery of the local state. Paradoxically, perhaps, having been set up with very different aims, they were among the very few practical examples of alternative ways of working within and around that state.

Not only did John Benington write a highly influential critique of forms of local authority corporate management based on his CDP experience (Benington 1976), but others employed in Sheffield had played important parts in developing the wider politics and practice of the CDPs (e.g. as members of the collective teams responsible for CDP 1977a and b).

Possibly more important in their new roles within Sheffield's officer structure, they looked back to the CDP experience as a model for current practice, suggesting that some of those with different experiences were less able to cope with (or understand) the complexity of their position. John Benington confirmed this point, explicitly suggesting that, "Those who did not have the necessary experience tended not to understand or else underestimated the ways of using and working in the local state. At best they tended to have a theoretical view and had read about it but they had very little practical effective experience of translating those theories into practice" (Interview, 10th April 1983). Similar comments were made by several other officers with CDP experience, whose importance seems to have been the balancing act it assumed between broad political conclusions and detailed local initiative, as well as the need to maintain relationships with (and even formal accountability to) those who were not always sympathetic to the wider ambitions of those working in the Projects.

It is dangerous, however, to make too much of the CDP connection. Despite the collective publications of the Projects and some shared experience, they never had a unified programme. In the case of Sheffield the links through CDP simply confirm the existence of networks, more broadly summarised in terms of a 'new urban left', which was not reducible

to the Labour Party, and was not just a localised phenomenon. Few of the new officers had been actively involved in the Labour Party, although some were members. The focus of their attention had been on other aspects of the labour movement or community organisation. And this helps to confirm Gyford's warnings. The 'new urban left' of which many of the new officers were a part was a loose alliance, in large part held together by their differences from others and criticism of existing arrangements, rather than any shared programme of their own.

In the case of Sheffield, not only did the individuals appointed come from different points in the radical spectrum, but the experience of the work they undertook served to widen rather than narrow differences in practice. It was clear from interviews that some were committed to seeking to intervene into the economy at local level, influencing the operation of the private sector; others rejected such a strategy, arguing instead that only council based initiatives (municipal enterprise and direct employment) were worth fighting for; some emphasised their commitment to the development of worker cooperatives; and others based themselves on a commitment to support and service community and trade union organisations; all of them found their relationship with the council machinery difficult to deal with.

12.3 New organisational forms

The work of the department was divided in ways which expressed different priorities and different understandings within the rather uncertain coalition represented by the officers of local socialism. There was no clear and single worked out new left economic policy to be picked down from the shelf, and many of the differences of approach were reflected in the organisational divisions within the department, despite the frequently stated fiction that they were not based on divisions of expertise or profession, but merely reflected current work priorities within the department. But since it was still not clear what the overall framework was to be, in practice an uncertain political settlement was reflected in rather confused organisational forms. The structure of the new department reflected the tensions within the ambitions of those who set it up, but these tensions were reinforced in the process of policy development.

At first, management within the department was intended to suggest a new model within local government, imported from the traditions of the new officers, particularly the new Employment Coordinator. It was

assumed that the most important decisions - what Benington called the 'employment strategy' - would be developed by the members of the department as a collective, rather than as the result of a series of ad hoc decisions, taken by project teams or divisions of the department. From the start a coordinating group, made up of the principal development officers, the equal opportunities officer and the Employment Coordinator, was set up, to meet weekly, and develop this strategy. In addition there were to be regular (three weekly) meetings of the staff as a whole to consider policy, including the decisions of the coordinating group. Although the Employment Coordinator retained final powers of decision-making and could overrule the coordinating group and staff group, this represented a substantial modification of traditional departmental hierarchies within local government departments, with a model closer to that of the community organisations (including the Community Development Projects and Coventry Workshop) with which the Employment Coordinator and other officers were familiar.

The organisational structure of the department changed markedly over the course of the 1980s, but it is also possible to identify important continuities across it, and even back to the industrial development work of the 1970s. The initial structure agreed in 1981 was organised around five

broad areas of work, two of which were retained from the past - namely, industrial development (described as covering the promotion of trade, inward investment, industrial land and premises) and Sheffield Enterprises (described as covering financial assistance and specialist advice to workers' cooperatives, small firms and new job creation initiatives) (City of Sheffield Employment Department 1982a). The other three new areas for development, and for which new staff were being sought in early 1982, were Economic Development and Major Investments, an Employment Research and Resource Unit and New Technology. The Department was to be organised around these divisions in the first instance, with each area being headed by a Principal Development Officer.

The three new programme areas reflected the changing priorities of the department. The first, and smallest in terms of staffing, Economic Development and Major Investments, was also potentially the most ambitious, since it was concerned to explore the possibilities for directing large scale investment into the local economy. It assumed the possibility of public/private sector partnerships in which the public sector would have a powerful role and councils would no longer be relegated to servicing small firms seeking assistance (on the model of Sheffield Enterprises). Even at this stage, however, it was clear that Sheffield was unlikely to

follow the enterprise board route (taken up by the Greater London Council and West Midlands County Council at the same time), since the head of this section was only to be appointed on a two year contract, and have no staff working directly to her/him. Although there were commitments to some form of enterprise board in early discussions (e.g. reflected in Notes for Candidates for the post of Employment Coordinator), these were soon translated into support for feasibility studies (e.g. in Labour's election manifesto in 1982).

The second area - the Employment Research and Resource Unit - was the one linked most closely to Benington's past experience in a community resource centre. But it also fitted in well with the ambitions of councillors to be able to offer support to trade union and community organisations, and to provide the basis on which to undertake sectoral studies of the local economy, possibly feeding into local business decisions, seeking to influence central government policy and providing a context for local authority intervention. Previous reports on cutlery and steel had been prepared on an ad hoc basis and a more specialist unit might make it possible to improve consistency. Its tasks were described as : "to monitor Sheffield's economy, industry and firms; to disseminate information about employment trends to councillors, trade unions,

employers and community organisations; to assist groups trying to prevent further loss of jobs by carrying out social audits on firms threatened with closure or redundancy and by preparing alternative community plans for local industries" (City of Sheffield Employment Department 1982a).

The identification of a division responsible for New Technology was a statement of intent, a recognition of the importance of the area. An important element of its work would be to raise the profile of new technology in the city, by encouraging "constructive debate, policy and action" (City of Sheffield Employment Department 1982a). An early aim was to identify the existing impact of microelectronics on existing jobs - in terms of numbers employed, the nature of work and patterns of employment.

The other, continuing, areas of work within the department were also to be substantially reoriented. There was to be a move away from the marketing activities which had previously been so important in Industrial Development. The new approach questioned the strategy of supporting promotional trips to foreign countries (such as Japan and the West Coast of America) and providing support for consultants in them who would give advice to Sheffield companies. Instead, there was support for the building of links to rather different countries, such as China. In the longer term, it

was hoped that the development and marketing of land could reflect the new priorities of the new department, although in the early days it was accepted that the role of the Estates Surveyor's department might make that difficult. Within Sheffield Enterprises (soon retitled Aids to Enterprises), a range of new appointments seemed intended to make its old ambitions more difficult to achieve. Three specialist officers were appointed. The first (responsible for aids to industry) had the task of giving applicants for funds advice on other sources of finance for job creation and investment (e.g. central government, the European Community, banks and private financial institutions); the second (responsible for product development) was supposed to help enterprises (cooperatives as well as other firms) with technical and marketing advice on the successful development of socially useful products; the third (responsible for municipal enterprise) was to look at the opportunities for the council itself to generate jobs through its own role as local investor, purchaser and provider of services. So the emphasis was moved away from direct financial assistance to advice on other sources of investment finance and on product development, and a new stress was being placed on the council's own role as an economic actor, rather than its ability to influence an 'economy' defined as separate and outside itself.

There was a similar justification for the appointment of an officer responsible for equal opportunities which also took place at this time. This post was the result of initiative from the new chief officer. In contrast to the experience in other 'local socialist' authorities, equal opportunities had not been identified as a separate issue before his arrival and the continuing ambivalence of the council leadership was reflected in the way in which the new post fitted into the department's organisational structure. Although advertised as a Principal Development Officer reporting to the Employment Coordinator, the post was filled at a lower grade than the other Principal Development Officers and the person appointed had no officers reporting to her. Nevertheless, the intention of the appointment and the involvement of the person appointed in the Departmental Coordinating Group was to ensure that an equal opportunities "perspective is actively represented in all programmes and departmental decision-making" (Benington 1982, p. 2). By the end of 1982, this priority was given greater recognition with the setting up of a specialist project team, Equal Opportunities (Women and Employment).

A further project team was set up to cover Training for Employment in 1982, and Municipal Enterprises which was initially part of a group with Economic Development became increasingly autonomous by 1983, headed by

a senior officer seconded from another part of the authority. So, in the early 1980s there were teams organised around Equal Opportunities (Women and Employment), Economic Development, Aids to Enterprises, Industrial Development, New Technology, Training for Employment, and Municipal Enterprises as well as a Research and Resource Unit. Similar divisions survived until the mid 1980s³.

The separate groups within the department tended to develop their own interests, defined partly in terms of the divisions which were implied by the organisational structure which they found on arrival and partly in terms of the different ideas with which they started and different backgrounds from which they came. When the department was set up there seems to have been the rather naive assumption that those employed would start from a similar understanding of the problems, so that they could also begin to develop similar solutions. Since the political approach which underlay the department remained uncertain even as the policy developed, it proved rather more difficult to achieve such unity.

12.4 Fitting into the council machinery

One of the aims of Sheffield's council leadership in setting up the new

department was to influence the wider organisational culture of the council. It was set up as a department with representation on the Council's management team in part at least to ensure that its chief officer would be involved in arguments at senior level as part of a process of influencing the policy direction taken by other departments. Indeed, it was acknowledged from the start that the response of those departments would be as important to the success of the Council's employment initiatives as any independent action taken by the Employment Department itself. In addition, the department and its officers were expected to be close to the political priorities of the council's political leadership and not to conform to the traditional civil service (and local government) model of impartial administration. They were to be the carriers of the new policies within the existing bureaucratic structures of the council, in places to which councillors would not normally have access. Looking back on the first year of the department's life, John Benington stressed its "role as a catalyst trying to affect the distribution of resources and the nature of decision making in the local authority as a whole...There is no doubt that the work we have been doing has challenged many traditional assumptions - firstly, the notion that local government officers are there to provide neutral professional advice of a technical kind and secondly, that departments are

there simply to provide services. We are quite clear that we are not operating with any neutral professionalism, and quite clear that we are committed. We have a particular analysis and that is shared with and in tune with the controlling group on the City Council, and what we are saying is that we are offering rigorous competent [advice] but not that it is neutral or technical" (Alcock et al 1984, pp 74-75). At its most strongly expressed, the new department represented an alternative form of corporate policy making, with ambitions to influence decisions throughout the council machinery.

The area of economic development was one in which existing professional structures were weak. Those working in it did not have the status of officers in the major service or central departments. As a result it was one of the easiest areas through which to introduce new approaches. The new department was set up outside the existing systems of policy and professional networks. Even 'traditional' or 'mainstream' local economic policy development policies were only weakly related to such networks. An Association of Industrial Development Officers did exist, but it was not based on any recognisable features of professionalisation. There were no clearly shared characteristics of industrial development officers or their training which made it possible to identify a 'profession'. At best the

Association could be seen to be at an early stage of professionalisation, seeking to develop and identify shared needs for training and the ability to take on a representational role.

If the relative weakness of the economic development role left it relatively open to change, not surprisingly, the changes also encouraged tensions with the officers of other departments, who frequently commented that members of the Employment Department seemed to be making claims to the work of others - often suggesting that they did so with little (professionally based) understanding of likely consequences. Such comments were particularly common within the planning and education departments. The equal opportunities aspects of the department's work, which came to involve pressures on other departments for change, was also seen as a challenge to the role of the personnel department, particularly after the appointment of a new chief officer who sought to develop his own equal opportunities policies. An early initiative to set up a one year project to "examine the City Council's employment patterns and practices in relation to women's employment" (quoted in City of Sheffield Employment Department 1983 Para 3.9.2.) was effectively taken over by the Personnel Department, although the researcher was expected to liaise with the Employment Department and another researcher

in the Ethnic Minorities Unit.

In interviews, several officers from other departments began by stating their support for the Employment Department in principle, before going on to identify particular areas of its work with which they were not happy. Members of the Treasurer's department expressed doubts about their preparedness to apply strict financial criteria to funding proposals, and fears about the likelihood that council funds might be wasted. The Estates Surveyors' Department remained critical of moves to use land and property in ways which they did not consider appropriate, that is looking for ways in which to dispose of them in ways which generated most income. The intervention of the Employment Department into the field of training aroused irritation from the Education Department, and colleges within it, because it seemed able to draw on resources unavailable to them, undermining their provision. Even members of the planning department, who worked most closely with officers of the Employment Department, expressed concern about that Department's commitment to what were perceived as abstract political principles. They were concerned that the new officers did not have sufficient understanding of the 'need' to work with and be sympathetic to the demands of developers to encourage investment by them. Several officers including chief officers, commented

on the lack of experience exhibited by officers in the Employment Department, noting particularly the extent to which there appeared to be divisions between them at meetings (see also Chandler and Lawless 1985, p. 196).

Despite the political support it received, the status of the Department within the Council was also uncertain because it did not carry the responsibilities and budgets of the other departments. It did not have service delivery or statutory responsibilities. By 1986 the Department was well established with a staff of 87, but, even comparable departments (with few direct responsibilities for service provision) such as Central Services (with a full time equivalent staff of 701) and Land and Planning (with 562) employed far more people. And, of course, the main service providers, such as housing, social services and education, employed still more (see Table 2). However sympathetic the politicians, or other chief officers, the Employment Department was unlikely to have the same weight in council decision making.

But tensions were also apparent in other ways. There were continuing concerns from the treasurer's and legal departments about the financial and legal implications of the department's activities. Of the five specialist officers appointed to Sheffield Enterprises in 1982 two (an accountant and

Table 2. Full-time equivalents employed in Departments of Sheffield City Council. September 1986

| Department | Numbers employed (fte) |
|---|------------------------|
| Central services (i.e. including administration and legal) | 701 |
| Cleansing | 947 |
| Design and Building Services | 550 |
| Education | 12305 |
| Employment | 87 |
| Environmental Health | 220 |
| Family and Community Services (i.e. social services) | 4344 |
| Housing | 900 |
| Land and Planning (which had absorbed the old Estates' Surveyor's Department) | 562 |
| Libraries/Arts/Museums | 595 |
| Recreation | 1577 |
| Works | 4070 |

Source: City of Sheffield 1987, p. 15.

a lawyer) were to be employed through other departments but be based in the Employment Department. The precise nature of their relationships to

the City Treasury and the Administrative and Legal Department were left rather vague, but it appears that they were expected both to ensure that the new department followed the financial and legal rules of local government, and to give advice to the officers of the department and those with whom they were working on financial and legal responsibilities. In other words, they seem to have combined the roles of providing internal (negative) control and offering (positive) advice on what was possible. The accountant was expected to help firms prepare proposals and advise on potential sources of finance within the private sector; the solicitor was expected to help on a range of issues, including the preparation of planning agreements and clarifying the legal structures of small firms. But senior officers in the City Treasury, in particular, were clear that they expected their seconded officer to concentrate more on policing the operation of the new department than in helping firms prepare proposals for financial assistance. There was a concern that the radicalism of the new initiatives should not lead the department to take unnecessary legal or financial risks, particularly in offering finance to the private and co-operative sectors. Paradoxically these concerns may have reflected a failure to understand the ambitions of the new department, whose own chief officer was dubious about the value of providing assistance to firms in the private

sector, which, he felt, were likely to be drain on the limited resources available to the council without delivering a great deal in terms of employment.

Some of the most important political tensions, as indicated above, were within the organisation: within the council machinery. Not only were there conflicts between officers in the new department and those in other departments, but there were also conflicts within the department itself. But acknowledging the importance of intra-organisational politics does not mean that other forms of politics can be ignored. It may not be possible to explain developments in Sheffield solely by analysing the behaviour of elected politicians, but it would be equally dangerous to ignore them.

Notes

1. Interview with G. Green and J. Benington 7/2/84.
2. Expressed, for example, in comments made during a bus trip organised for officers and councillors around the Lower Don Valley in February 1983.
3. Towards the end of the decade, the main areas of the department's work were identified as Municipal Enterprise, Economic and Industrial Development, New Technology and Product Development, Training for

Employment, Support for the Unemployed, and Employment Research and Resources, so, formally the divisions had not changed much (Sheffield DEED, 1987a). By then the Council also had its own Women's Officer outside the Department.

Chapter 13. Case studies of change: towards a politics of partnership

The politics of Sheffield's economic policies were not fixed at the start of the decade. As we have argued above, they were initially shaped by the new professionals. But nor did they remain fixed over the period of the 1980s. On the contrary it is only by looking at them over this longer period that it becomes possible to understand the overall direction of change after the initial shock of 'local socialism'. In order to explore the processes of change in some detail and to identify some of its key features, the next two sections will focus on two particular areas of policy development, before returning to a consideration of more general points. The two cases under consideration will be the development of the Red Tape Studios and the development of policies for the Lower Don Valley. The first of these arose from the council's new emphasis on municipal enterprise and was largely the product of initiatives taken by new professionals - it would not have been a priority for the council without those initiatives. The second was a long standing concern of the council and its councillors, and one about which the new professionals initially

expressed ambivalence. At the end of the decade it dominated the council's economic policy.

13.1 The Red Tape Story

Red Tape, Sheffield's municipally owned recording studios, opened in 1986 in a building which had previously been a car showroom (Autoways). The processes which made the development possible and developments since then highlight some of the ways in which Sheffield's economic development policies have developed over the decade.

In its early years, the Employment Department produced reports and statements which stressed its breadth of vision. The project which developed into Red Tape had similar origins. Helen Jackson (Chair of the Employment Committee) stressed that it started with a "grandiose vision that the popular end of the cultural industry both in video and film was going to be a growing industry for the future" and that this growth should not simply be concentrated in London, but that there also ought to be successful concentrations outside London. Instead of talented individuals being forced to move away from Sheffield for employment and facilities, it

was hoped that it would be possible to provide it locally, possibly moving further towards new forms of employment. The vision included a desire to see that "training and decent wages and decent conditions" would be provided, so that "the young musicians and young people involved in those industries were not going to be exploited". This was the vision within the department, but it was also rooted in a more community oriented base. In 1982 Paul Skelton was given responsibility for developing ideas and proposals in the field of municipal enterprise, and the idea for a recording studio came out of initial contacts with the Leadmill Arts Association, and was confirmed and developed in meetings with local bands and video companies. Some of the bands involved had already been successful (e.g. Human League, ABC, Heaven 17, the Comsat Angels and Cabaret Voltaire), whilst others were still unsuccessful, and many of those active were unemployed. Of 500 bands in the city at the time, only around 25 had recording contracts. According to Skelton, "There was a wealth of activity which did not have any infrastructure to support it in terms of good quality rehearsal and recording facilities". The idea for this came, therefore, from the people who needed the facilities. The existence of the department opened up the council to demands from a group of people who had

previously had little interest in its workings.

The initial phase of persuading the council to take the initiative was not easy. At first, the Estates Surveyor's Department sought to dispose of the property on commercial terms, and it was only pressure from the Employment Department which averted this. Secondly, however, there was a high degree of scepticism among councillors about the project, particularly in its more developed forms. Many were unconvinced by the argument that forms of economic activity like these were equivalent to the old industries which had dominated in the city. Initially attempts were made to raise funding from various other sources, including the Musicians' Union, charities and trusts, but little progress was made. As a result, a proposal was made to get Urban Programme assistance for the development, but it was not given priority selection by the Council. In order to ensure that some support was forthcoming, the next stage was to put together a very modest proposal for funding, on the basis of which further development might be possible in the future. Eventually, the Committee and the Labour Group agreed to provide some £70,000 in capital spending to pay for the building of two rehearsal rooms and a four track porta studio (in the end closer to £100,000 was finally allocated to this

phase of the project). Some of the doubts of the finance officers about the project were overcome by the involvement of private sector accountants from the music industry (associated with the more successful bands who were involved) who were able to show that the project was likely to be viable.

The success of this initial development made it easier for the project to be put into the next round of bids for Urban Programme support, and funding was attracted to build a sixteen track recording studio, and a third rehearsal room (Red Tape Phase 2); as well as for a further rehearsal room, eight track recording studio and library (Red Tape Phase 3). Alongside these developments, it was possible to utilise Urban Programme funds to rehabilitate the building within which Red Tape is housed - renamed AVEC (Audio Visual Enterprise Centre) - putting the building into sound manageable order, connecting gas and electricity, putting on a roof but relying on new tenants to construct their own spaces, including walls and floors in some cases. In managing the tenants of the building, attempts were made to allow community based groups to keep costs down by locating them next to offices or studios constructed by more commercial enterprises. At the end of the 1980s, AVEC contained three commercial

recording studios, film studios and graphic design companies, including a women's film co-operative and a photography gallery. Red Tape and AVEC were effectively put together by a partnership between local government (providing property and 'seed' money), central government (through the Urban Programme), the private sector (particularly those bands which invested in commercial recording studios within the building) and the voluntary sector (who are tenants of some of the spaces within the building). A bid had also been made for ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) money to provide infrastructure for proposed new developments, and European Social Fund money was being used to provide a course for unemployed young people on recording techniques.

By the end of the decade the ambitions of the early years had been reinterpreted, but were still recognisable. The studios were open to wide range of groups, from jazz to rock, to opera (although there was some evidence that the local black youth felt excluded by the apparent rock orientation of the studios and support had been sought for a more black oriented studio. Red Tape itself was seeking to deal with this by purchasing more appropriate equipment - e.g. for sampling - and more than half of those on the ESF sponsored course were from ethnic minorities).

The next phase of development proposed to be the most ambitious. It was to develop the neighbouring (and larger) Kennings building. The proposals for this building are similar to those for AVEC but on a bigger scale. Again, it is intended to undertake the provision of basic infrastructure, before encouraging private companies to build the accommodation they need. In this case, however, the intention is to attract what could be seen as more 'mainstream' tenants, including a radio station, a television station, a media centre with three cinema screens and a preview theatre. In the case of AVEC it was estimated that around £400,000 was invested from the public sector (government money through the City Council) and the overall total of construction costs was around £2.5m, so that there was a 'leverage' rate of around 8:1. It is hoped that in the Kennings Building the leverage rate will be more like 11 or 12:1. It was estimated that the cost of putting in lifts, staircases, fire escapes and repair to the fabric of the building would be around £1m, so that £11-12m is expected from the private sector, with around 40-50 companies making investments.

The aim is to use these developments as major elements in constructing a wider Cultural Industries Quarter in the area around Red Tape, where a number of other cultural facilities (such as the Leadmill and

Yorkshire Artspace) are already located. So, in a sense, the links to the ambitions of the past begin to be clearer. Here is the vision of a new industrial sector being reintroduced. And certainly the glossy publicity documents associated with the Quarter seem to reinforce this feeling. According to one, "Drawing on the wealth and creative talent and experience that exists in and around Sheffield, the Council is co-ordinating an ambitious plan to develop an entire area of the city as a centre for cultural industries and helping to provide accommodation and facilities for expanding organisations" (Economic and Public Sector Development Team, n.d.). There are hopes for basing a national centre for popular music here.

Equally significant, however, the policies have developed in such a way that municipal enterprise in the form of Red Tape has now become, not an end in itself, but the basis on which to build a much more extensive public/private partnership. One reason for this extension have been that the scope for municipal enterprise was severely limited by financial restrictions, but it also made it possible (through 'leverage') to mobilise far more resources than would have been available from the council, even if its spending had not been restricted by controls from above. One of the ambitions of the left's local economic policies had always been to

encourage wider processes of growth. Building new relations with the private sector seemed to have made this realisable at last. In echoes of the traditional local authority role, the council provides the infrastructure on the basis of which private sector development prospects become attractive to the private sector. The new glossy material is specifically aimed to attract developers, in a more radical and targeted version of the attempts to market land and property which dominated in the 1970s. The document on the Cultural Industries Quarter concludes with the suggestion that potential tenants for the new development should contact the Department. A site whose development would have been difficult has now been targeted and successfully managed and marketed. The policies of the 1970s were essentially market led. It was assumed that the 'market' (largely defined as property and development companies) knew best and council policies were largely 'opportunistic', attempting to respond to demands expressed through it. In the case of Red Tape the council's role was more active. The officers involved sought actively to create a market, in which they could sell what they had available. It was a piecemeal process of construction finally intended to draw in a substantial investment of private sector funds and to make a cultural industries

quarter which could be more or less self sustaining.

13.2 The Lower Don Valley

The Lower Don Valley is the old industrial heartland of Sheffield. It was here that many of its traditional steel and engineering plants were located, and it is here that the problems of industrial dereliction are at their most apparent. In the late 1980s around 35% of the Valley's land was derelict or vacant and over 1m sq feet of industrial buildings were vacant and most of this space was unsuitable for conversion to modern offices (SERC 1987, para 2.2.. See also Germer 1983 and Dabinett 1991 pp. 13-14 for a discussion of the Valley's decline as a source of employment). It was the most direct geographical expression of Sheffield as 'steel city' (see Ch. 9 for a discussion of its historical development) and its decline underpinned some of the political pressures for developing a local economic policy. It had been the base of Sheffield's traditional politics of labour, rooted in the steel and engineering unions, and the narrow streets built around the factories. Pearson notes that, "The history of the valley features strongly in local people's perception of Sheffield's identity"

(Pearson 1987, p. 35). The Lower Don Valley and the communities associated with its industries were the sources of important myths within local Labour politics. It was to these that some councillors (such as Bill Michie who was the first chair of the Employment Committee) often referred as providing their political roots. And the changing politics around the plans and proposals for the Valley neatly reflect the shifts taking place within local politics.

Until the late 1970s, the land use policies for the Valley reflected its security as Sheffield's industrial base. The Development Plans of 1952 and 1957 first limited the extent of housing and then zoned the whole area for industrial use (Lawless and Ramsden 1990a, p. 34). The emphasis of the planning process was on providing adequate supplies of industrial land to the firms based in the Valley. It was not until the late 1970s that the tone of policy began to change. Instead of assuming that land had to be set aside to meet the pressures of potential development, by 1979, although it was still assumed that the Valley would be primarily used for industrial development, the argument was that development had to be encouraged "to ensure against the possibility of a declining employment base and providing for employment needs not only in Sheffield but also adjoining

areas" (Sheffield City Council 1979, p.48, quoted in Lawless and Ramsden 1990a, p. 38). From the end of the 1970s, the Lower Don Valley became an increasingly important part of the active politics of development, rather than simply a location in which industrial development was permitted. The Draft District Plan prepared in 1981 confirmed both that land in the Lower Don should remain allocated to industrial use, with remaining housing being cleared to make this possible, and that (quoting the County structure plan) "major effort will be needed to ensure maximum employment growth in the Lower Don Valley and adjoining locations" (Sheffield City Council 1981b p. 44).

This was reflected in an attempt in 1980, initially led by the planning department and supported by George Wilson, then council leader, to put forward a bid for an enterprise zone to be located in the Lower Don Valley. The council was informed in 1980 that it had been shortlisted, and - after some debate - agreed in April to proceed to develop a more extensive proposal. In effect, the new leadership was placed in a position which meant it had to do so or withdraw the council's initial bid. And the main argument was that if a bid was not made, Sheffield would lose out on potential new development and on access to assistance from central

government (see Shutt 1984 for a summary of some of the debates which took place in Labour councils at this time). But the proposal submitted by the council was substantially different from the one which had initially been envisaged. It specified a number of key conditions - in particular on continued planning controls within the area - which meant that it was unlikely to be successful. It was turned down by the Secretary of State in February 1981. Officers of the local Chamber of Commerce argued that so many restrictions were placed on the proposal by the council that the government simply "lost patience" and went elsewhere¹. At the time there was some concern (expressed in an exchange of letters between the Directors of Planning of the two authorities) that an Enterprise Zone was instead awarded to Rotherham, just across the municipal boundaries from the Lower Don Valley. Since it seemed likely that retail and warehouse development would take place in the zone, it was feared that not only would new development tend to move across the boundary, but that any retail development would undermine the prosperity of Sheffield's central shopping area.

There was no attempt to bid for an enterprise zone for the Valley in the next round of bids which took place in 1982. By this time the new

political leadership had gained in confidence, the strategy officers were in post and the new employment department had been created. This decision was not a straightforward one. There was support within the Labour Group for preparing a bid, on the grounds that there seemed to be little alternative, and similar arguments were made by some members of the planning department, particularly because they were concerned about the impact of the Rotherham zone on development in Sheffield. The Chamber of Commerce also supported the idea of bidding for a zone. But the political grounds for not proceeding were strong ones. It would have been difficult for a political leadership associated with the local authority left to allow itself to be drawn into these schemes. And a series of strong arguments were put together by the Principal Strategy Officers, officers in the Employment Department and the Council's leaders. These were summarised in a press statement which expressed concern about the extent to which the planning and rating rules in the zones helped to undermine "democratic accountability and responsibility to the community" (Blunkett 1982a, p. 2). And it also went on to argue that setting up an enterprise zone was unlikely to bring significant growth to the City, because neighbouring areas would lose industry while rental costs inside the zone rose to take

account of rate reductions. "It has been decided that snatching at bottles labelled 'Medicine' only to find that they are in fact full of poison is not the way to restore the industrial and economic future of Sheffield" (Blunkett 1982a, p. 3. See also Sheffield City Council 1982b, pp. 5-9).

But, it was accepted that a policy was needed for the Lower Don Valley where the enterprise zone would have been located. Indeed, according to the press statement the council had "put together" and was "proposing to promote a totally different approach", which was described as "its own challenging and innovatory scheme" (Blunkett 1982, pp 3 and 4). The council called on the government for support for this initiative. This response to the Conservative government's proposals was an expression of the political leadership's desire to present an alternative model, resisting the policy direction of the centre, supported by the ambitions of its new officers. It also suggested a belief in the council's own ability to develop initiatives, independently with no reference to partnership.

In fact, however, the council did not yet have its own project for the Valley. It was able to state principles, but not yet spell out their practical consequences. The alternative strategy was summarised very briefly in a report to Policy committee. It was to be based on:

- "i) planned growth led by the public sector - in contrast to any further removal of democratic controls over private development and industry;
- ii) regeneration of the local economy under local determination and control, with wide consultation from the bottom up, releasing the resources and skills of the community;
- iii) an emphasis on direct intervention to preserve existing employment and create new jobs, in contrast to an indirect approach through the property market" (Sheffield City Council 1982b, p. 11).

Here, some of the weaknesses of the new economic strategy can be highlighted.

The priorities of the council were clear enough - the councillors wanted a plan which would look like a convincing alternative to an enterprise zone. But the new Employment Department was not very well equipped to produce such a plan. Each section had its own priorities and none was convinced that it was possible to do so. Many officers were sceptical of the idea of any area based initiative, believing that concentrating resources in this way simply disadvantaged others, moving the problem around rather than solving it. Some of these were more concerned to develop campaigning strategies supporting particular groups

of workers threatened with redundancy, or around the construction of more developed campaigns around the steel industry as a whole². Others were simply reluctant to become involved, not acknowledging the political significance of the project. Despite the proposal's high political profile, the officer most involved in preparing the draft complained of the lack of any "collective contribution, criticism - or support" from within the department³. The first attempt to develop a more extensive proposal through an officer working party led by the Employment Department was rejected by the Labour Group in December 1982, largely because it seemed unachievable, making large claims and calling for a major financial contribution (Sheffield City Council 1982a). It was effectively disowned by other departments, including the Treasury and the planning department. The failure of this proposal forced the department to work more closely with the planning department in a specialist working group, also including members of the estates and recreation departments and a consultant from outside the authority was involved in trying to explore the contributions available from the various sections of the department. The end result of this process was the production of 'An Employment and Environmental Plan for the Lower Don Valley', which was approved by the Labour Group in

November 1983, and published for consultation in 1984 (Sheffield City Council Central Policy Unit 1984).

This document highlights some of the key tensions which ran through the Council's attempt to construct a local economic strategy. Even its apparent organisational home - the Central Policy Unit - confirms the extent to which the Employment Department had been unable to take the lead in developing the proposals. It is introduced by a preface written by David Skinner, the Chair of the Environment and Planning Programme Committee, rather than Helen Jackson, Chair of the Employment Programme Committee. More important, perhaps, the balance within it between explicit political campaigning and more traditional activities to be undertaken by departments of the council suggests both a wider acceptance of economic priorities within the council machinery and the beginnings of a move away from the more explicitly 'socialist' aspects of Sheffield's local socialism. It is possible to interpret the plan as an expression of the way in which Sheffield's commitment to new economic policies influenced the work of the planning department, but the balance reflected here looks to be rather more the reverse - the dominant language of the plan is that of the planners, even in the discussion of new employment zones. The plan

starts by stressing that it must "recognise the limits to any local initiative and grasp any opportunity to relate it to wider national and international change" and as a consequence it is argued that "the Council's policy has to be seen as part of the battle for change at national level, both showing the direction in which the new policies can be developed and recognising that only major shifts in economic and industrial policy can rescue areas like the Lower Don". If those shifts do not take place, it is argued, then Sheffield's own initiatives will fail, so the proposals are "intended to combine the possibilities of carrying out a broader political campaign with practical proposals for local improvement in the short and medium terms" (Sheffield City Council Central Policy Unit 1984, p. 7).

Having made these introductory comments, the document goes on to identify a series of initiatives, largely organised around a discussion of land use in the Lower Don Valley. It confirms the dominant use of the area for industrial purposes, although the possibility of housing development is also discussed, and emphasis is placed on linking industrial development and environmental improvement. The plan moves beyond simple statements of zoning, to outline initiatives intended to encourage development along the lines identified. It is argued that the Employment Department needs to

take the spatial consequences of its policies seriously, and particular reference is given to research and campaigning support for the remaining parts of the steel industry in Sheffield, although it is also recognised that it will be impossible to recreate the old industrial base of the area.

Proposals are outlined for the creation of an Attercliffe Employment Area and a New Employment Zone, to bring together assistance for small business, the provision of infrastructure, landscaping and the provision of high standard commercial and industrial property. It is hoped that policies of product development will lead to demand for new sites in the area; co-operatives will be encouraged; and enterprise workshops will be located there. Alongside these proposals, there is a series of proposals for improving the physical environment through the construction of an East End Park and major landscaping, intended to provide an attractive environment to attract new forms of industry, linked to the development of industrial improvement areas and the careful monitoring of pollution.

The final section of the plan returns to some of the concerns stated at the start, stressing that "success in regenerating an industrial slum depends...upon recreating a political climate in which public expenditure is a primary instrument of economic recovery". It argues for a process of

consultation to include campaigning, involving all the groups in the community who might have an interest in the proposals. "Such a campaign should not only draw people together to challenge the logic of the market and its political backers, but provide a useful basis to challenge the notion of an Enterprise Zone by emphasising that unfettered capitalism can hardly be expected to regenerate areas it has already destroyed" (Sheffield City Council Central Policy Unit 1984, p. 16). Finally, however, the ambitions of the plan are expressed to a set of budgetary proposals involving the capital expenditure of £12m spread over the years 1983-89, with the hope that £4m of this could be drawn from external sources (Sheffield City Council Central Policy Unit 1984, p. 20). By 1986-7 the council was allocating around £6m to projects in the Valley (Lawless and Ramsden 1990a, p. 44) and in 1987-8 it was absorbing nearly 40% of the City's Urban Programme funding (Pearson 1987, p. 38).

This plan emphasised the importance of public sector investment, but did so in a context in which such investment could not realistically be expected on the scale required. The strategy suggested could only work, as the plan itself acknowledges, if it generated political change at national level. Yet such a possibility looked increasingly unlikely in the mid 1980s,

and other strategic visions were already beginning to appear within the policies of the council, in this case, particularly encouraged by the perspectives of planners, but also in the development of policy within the Employment Department, and by local and national politicians. Here the document already hinted at needs for cooperative activity - in particular referring to industrial improvement areas, and suggesting ways in which public initiative and private sector development might interact, for example in encouraging small firms in Attercliffe or in the supportive environment of technology parks and the support for high grade landscaping to attract more high tech industries. It represented a move away from the rejection of land based strategies which had characterised the early days of the department.

The plan continues to stress the need to harness "private industry and finance to an accountable public sector" (Sheffield City Council Central Policy Unit 1984, p. 21) but it also began to provide a basis on which it became possible to make a more explicit move towards notions of 'leverage' (i.e. the use of public sector investment to generate higher levels of investment from the private sector, or other parts of the public sector) and of 'partnership' between the public and private sectors, although these

terms were not used within it. If it was not possible to mobilise public sector finance, perhaps it would be possible to mobilise investment from the private sector, by making such investment more attractive. The ambition to transform the Lower Don helped to reinforce the understanding that existing local authority resources were inadequate. This was a point stressed in the comments of the City Treasury, whose officers persistently pointed to the importance of private sector investment, commenting on schemes for the Valley that the precarious financial position of the council was likely to lead to "the postponement of completion of major projects without either radical reallocation of resources or private sector investment" (quoted in Waterhouse 1987, p. 19). In 1987, one of the council's chief planning officers commented that the plan had provided a framework within which local initiatives were "aimed at the concentration of finance in certain areas to attempt to tip the balance in favour of attracting private sector involvement" (Pearson 1987, p. 36).

The shift in emphasis away from industry as the sole land use in the Valley, also allowed the planners to behave rather more 'flexibly' in dealing with applications for planning permission, which resulted in the

approval of the massive Meadowhall development for retail use (with 92,000 sq metres of shopping space and 28,000 sq metres of leisure and exhibition space). This new development was seen as a potential catalyst for the Valley. Despite the recognition of risks for shopping in the central area of the city the new development gave Sheffield the chance of becoming a major regional shopping centre (drawing on shoppers in a 50 mile radius around the development), acting as a catalyst for further development in the Valley. It also represented a direct and powerful reply to the threats of retail development just across the city boundary in Rotherham's enterprise zone. Although plans for retail development on this scale had not had any place in the strategic plans produced by the council at any stage, this single development was likely to change the face of the Valley more than anything else proposed. Despite some misgivings, therefore, it was difficult to refuse planning permission, and it now appears as an important selling point in much promotional literature.

In the course of the 1980s, the Lower Don Valley became the main focus of industrial policy in Sheffield. And one consequence of this has been to reinforce a concern about environmental degradation. It has, says Dabinett, previously an officer in the Department of Employment and

Economic Development, "encouraged the dominance of physical renewal over industrial regeneration," in part because DEED proved unable to develop an alternative approach based on the sectoral analysis of key industries which would then not have been restricted to a limited spatial area (Dabinett 1991, p. 17). As Dabinett, himself acknowledges, however, such analysis would not have been very helpful without having access to significant funds for investment to encourage industrial restructuring or develop unorthodox forms of infrastructural support (e.g. through the provision of collective services on the technology park which has been developed in the Lower Don). Despite the existence of DEED, in practice it proved easier to draw on finance for land acquisition and reclamation for environmental improvement and recreation than for industrial development. Even the plan prepared in 1984 effectively pushed the Employment Department into second place as an active participant in development.

In the mid 1980s the language of partnership became more pronounced, and the Lower Don Valley became the focus for this, too. The (by now retitled) Department of Employment and Economic Development prepared what was called a Twin Valley strategy (i.e. one covering the

Lower Don and Sheaf Valleys) which confirmed the mix of uses which was beginning to be approved in practice, and was increasingly reflected in planning documents, but also indicated a range of possible joint schemes and the extent to which the public and private sectors needed to work together (for example through industrial improvement areas and infrastructural investment) (Sheffield DEED 1987b). The strategy implied by this plan confirmed that the city council "did not have the resources to bring about the economic regeneration required on its own. City Council resources were seen as being a leverage on both public ..and private capital. The strategy did not consist of a fixed plan but a strategy linked to a vision that could be shared by all groups in Sheffield" (Dabinett 1989, p. 4).

This vision found its institutional expression in the formation of the Sheffield Economic Regeneration Committee (SERC), which initially concentrated its attention on the Lower Don Valley. SERC commissioned a report on the Valley from Coopers and Lybrand which concluded that the most appropriate body to oversee the regeneration of the Valley would be what the consultants called an Urban Regeneration Project. This project would be a "private sector led body in which the management board is

elected by the participating partners (central and local government, private sector and community organisations)" (SERC 1987 para 6.11(h)). Planning powers would remain with the council, but the organisation would have the image of independence. It would have its own employees responsible to the new organisation's chief executive. In a sense such a project would be an organisational expression of the partnership reflected in SERC. The consultants' second choice was for an Urban Development Corporation in which planning powers remained with the Council, because the first choice could only work if it was supported by central government and it was acknowledged that such support was unlikely. The balance of control suggested for an URP summarises the extent to which the partnership model moved away from a dominance by the public sector. The consultants proposed that its board would be made up as follows: 3 members representing the City Council; 3 representing 'major' Sheffield businesses; 2 representing Lower Don Valley business; 1 representing English Estates; 2 representing property companies; and 1 representing community organisations (SERC 1987, para 6.24).

In practice, however, this vision was never given the chance to be realised. Although SERC and the consultants largely endorsed the policies

and plans of the Council, in 1988 much of the area was designated part of an Urban Development Corporation, which, in principle at least, could be seen as a way of removing development in the Lower Don from the control of the Council. But such a conclusion may be premature. One leading Sheffield industrialist (and member of SERC) commented that it was precisely because of the partnership at local level that the UDC was possible - as a reward rather than a punishment: "By working together as a local partnership, the national government said that has credibility and ...the UDC was announced" Field (1990, p.56). The council even managed to negotiate an agreement with the UDC when it was set up, signed at Sheffield's Science Park (itself the product of collaboration between the Department of Employment and Economic Development and English Estates) in July 1989. This set out a code of practice for co-operation rather than conflict to achieve economic regeneration and reduce unemployment in the City as a whole, confirming that the Corporation's responsibilities went beyond the boundaries of the Valley.

Despite this, not surprisingly perhaps, the Chair of the Employment Programme Committee continued to express uncertainty about the extent to which partnership could be sustained. The continued existence of SERC

as an open forum is seen as one way in which the Council and 'Sheffield' can influence an organisation which is otherwise only answerable to London. But the SDC's plans have clearly borrowed from those of the Council - with a continued shift away from heavy industry and even reference to the possibility of housing - and, indeed, senior members of the planning department (working on the Lower Don) have transferred over from the Council, one as director of planning (Sheffield Development Corporation 1989). One of the biggest developments (at Meadowhall) was already agreed before the SDC was set up. When it was formed, the Board of the SDC not only included two Labour Committee chairs, but also the leader of the Conservative Group (formally appointed as one of the 'industrialist' members), and most of the other members were also already members of SERC. So by the end of the decade, from setting out with ambitions to challenge the influence of the private sector and rejecting the imposition of one central government scheme, by the end the council had developed extensive partnership arrangements with the private sector and defined a set of local interests which held different groups together, and had learned to live with another central initiative: indeed had become more able than most to integrate it within a broader political settlement

at local level.

13.3 Moving towards 'partnership'

The dominant assessment of the trajectory of Sheffield's economic policies in the 1980s can be summarised relatively briefly. According to this, the City Council began the decade committed to a process of radical interventionism and opposition to the operations of the market and ended it deeply imbedded in partnership with the private sector. This is the view expressed by Seyd (1990), Lawless (1990), as well as writers for 'The Financial Times' and representatives of the local Chamber of Commerce (see, e.g., Fazey 1987, Field 1990, Fogarty and Christie 1990, pp. 91-2). The underlying argument seems to be that the early years of the 1980s represented some kind of an aberration (or, more positively, an overambitious experiment) and that now the Council's leaders have moved back to a more moderate and responsible position. Just as the initiatives of the early period can be seen to have gone alongside turmoil (and the rise of a radical left) within the Labour Party, so more recent developments can be seen to reflect the construction of a more moderate Labour Party ready

to take power under the leadership of Neil Kinnock.

Seyd, for example, argues that "the anti-capitalist ethos of the early 1980s was replaced by a new strategy of collaboration with local capital" (Seyd 1990, p. 339), and senior members of the local Chamber of Commerce note a move away from "megaphone democracy" (quoted in Fazey 1987, p. 15) in which the Council and the Chamber shouted at each other, to a relationship in which there is an "unofficial agreement" to leave disagreements to be dealt with behind closed doors (Field 1990, p. 50). And there are certainly marked differences between the rhetorical emphases of the early 1980s and those of the late 1980s: the first stressing the role of the public sector, the second emphasising the need for partnership between public and private sectors. Instead of arguing that market decisions and the private sector are to blame for decline, the new local realism stressed that "the two sectors shared enough common objectives to achieve some form of consensus" (Dabinett 1989, p. 5). Seyd concludes by reflecting of the shift he has identified: "If anything remains of the original socialist project, it is only the conviction that this local enterprise economy [which he says has replaced that project] can be more humane than the Thatcherite model, by dispersing economic benefits across the city and by maintaining

as decent level of community services so that all citizens can participate in and benefit from the city's revival" (Seyd 1990, p. 344).

Lawless largely explains the move in terms of a number of local changes in the mid 1980s, including the replacement of David Blunkett as leader (following his election to Parliament) with Clive Betts, the departure of John Benington and his replacement by a "less ideological figure" (Dan Sequerra), the transfer to Sheffield of a number of officers from South Yorkshire Metropolitan County Council (after its abolition) and a growing understanding of "intellectual sophistication, but practical irrelevance of radical municipal intervention" (Lawless 1990, p. 13). But he also stresses the changed political and economic context, pointing to the dangers which Sheffield would have faced had it tried to sustain a lonely struggle for "a radical programme of local economic intervention" (Lawless 1990, p. 14)⁴.

This interpretation of the processes of change which characterised the 1980s has some merit insofar as it highlights a move away from the radical rhetoric of the early years, and effectively confirms the end of the 'new urban left' or 'local socialism' as a separately identifiable political project. The mid 1980s did represent a watershed, as a series of factors

combined to confirm that local initiatives could not be transformed into a successful national programme, and, as a consequence, that even many local initiatives could not be sustained. By the mid 1980s, the hopes for dramatic change led by the local socialists had already faded, and the defeat for the local authority left in the ratecapping struggles of 1985-6, when Sheffield's Labour Group was split and a legal rate made despite the opposition of Blunkett, confirmed a less hopeful national political context. Sheffield claimed in its own campaign against rate capping to be against it "for the right reasons", presumably in contrast to other Labour groups who opposed it for other reasons. Although there was a final burst of resistance, largely expressed through attempts to maintain spending levels with the help of 'creative accounting', the limitations of this became clear with the election of the third Thatcher government in 1987 (for a discussion of this period, see, Blunkett and Jackson, K. 1987, Ch. 8 and Lansley et al 1989, Ch 3). It was no longer possible for a council to pretend that it could stand out on its own against all the pressures imposed from above, and it was still less possible for one department to suggest that it provided an alternative model.

In the case of Sheffield it was possible to delay drawing this

conclusion, but however gradual the process of change the direction of change in economic policies was clear enough. The emphasis in Employment Department publications first shifted towards the defence of local authority employment (e.g. in commissioned material on privatisation and its costs, Labour Research Department et al 1985 and SCAT 1985, and in Sheffield's employment plan, City of Sheffield 1987) and then explicitly towards an emphasis on partnership with private sector agencies. In organisational terms, too, the structure of the Employment Department changed: it was renamed the Department of Employment and Economic Development (which seemed to imply a shift back towards more traditional methods) and its head became a Director, rather than a Coordinator. Although internal relationships remained less hierarchical than in many other departments, the structure became more formal with line management expressed through a Director and two deputies, rather than any collegiate system. It is difficult to judge whether Duncan and Goodwin were accurate in the conclusions they drew about the early ambitions of the council leadership use economic policies as a means of constructing a community capable of sustaining radical forms of local politics (1985a and b; see also Goodwin 1986). But, if they were right, then any such

ambitions had clearly faded by the end of the decade.

But an analysis which stresses the extent of the break between the beginning and the end of the 1980s may fail to grasp more significant processes of restructuring. Because it focuses on the behaviour and policies of elected politicians as the pegs around which to construct a narrative, it also fails to connect with some of the key features of change and restructuring at the level of the local state. It suffers from many of the weaknesses in traditional approaches to the analysis of local government identified in Chapter 2, able to tell an interesting story but not yet able to understand its significance within wider processes of political and economic restructuring.

Attempting to explain the the direction of change in terms of changes in the personnel involved in key positions is not ultimately very convincing. The changes at leadership level, for example, explain little, if only because they did not all take place at the same time as Lawless implies: Helen Jackson replaced Bill Michie as Chair of the Employment Committee in 1983 (a change to which Lawless makes no direct reference) and remained in that position throughout the remainder of the decade; Dan Sequerra replaced John Benington as head of department in 1985; and Clive

Betts did not replace David Blunkett until 1987. Nor is it clear that all these changes can be seen as moves to more 'moderate', 'responsible' or 'less ideological' positions. Few would have suggested that the change in the Chair of the Employment Committee (when Helen Jackson replaced Bill Michie) was a move towards a less radical style. She continued to speak from a position on the left of the Council through the 1980s (even being prepared to question the wisdom of Sheffield's bid to host the World Student Games. Darke 1991). Similarly, the move from John Benington to Dan Sequerra as head of the Department is also difficult to characterise as a straightforward shift from a radical to a more conventional style. Until his appointment Sequerra had already been actively involved in the development of policy within the Department, as a representative (and Chair) of the District Labour Party, and he had generally supported the more radical initiatives developed within the Department, to the extent that his appointment was understood as promising a continuation of existing policy, rather than reversing it. He was not identified as a supporter of 'partnership' approaches, and - like Benington when he was appointed - the Conservatives promised to remove him when they gained a majority on the Council. The new Council Leader (Clive Betts) may not have

had quite the same political status as his predecessor, nor the same commitment to developing a new vision of politics, but he had been a central part of the leadership team over the earlier years of the decade, and was one of the small group which had been involved as leaders of the left from the start (in the 1970s) (see, e.g. Wainwright 1987, p.109).

Tensions between the different emphases in the development of economic policy remained apparent into the late 1980s. The introduction to Sheffield's employment plan expresses these clearly, stating that, "We advocate a new kind of partnership between government, local communities, the public and the private sector" but going on to argue that the "strategy we set out here is not to cut the public sector lifeline but instead to expand its role and use it effectively as a tool of economic regeneration" (Blunkett and Jackson, H. 1987, pp. 2 and 4).

The process of change across the 1980s was a more complex one, which needs to be related to shifts within the local state, within the local economy and in the wider context of political and economic restructuring, which also found their local expression. By the mid 1980s, the existence of the department was taken for granted within the authority. The department was also more clearly organised on local authority lines. Hierarchical

structures were taken for granted, with less emphasis on network arrangements for decision-making. Not only did the department now have two deputy directors, but greater care was taken about the presentation of cases to council committees, both in terms of ensuring that conflicting proposals did not come from within the department and in ensuring that preliminary work had been undertaken with other departments, frequently with the help of inter-departmental working groups and, sometimes, councillor/officer working groups. Having arrived with a commitment to less rigid forms of organisation, Benington helped to ensure that a more formalised structure was left to his successor. And it was also accepted that if change was to be achieved through the local authority machine, it had to involve compromise and negotiation rather than confrontation and challenge.

To some extent, these were hard lessons learned within the local authority machine. If the department's proposals were not simply to be ruled out of court, and if resources were to be mobilised from other parts of the authority then compromise was necessary. At the start of the decade, the council's economic policies had a high political priority and were enthusiastically supported and defended by local Labour politicians.

But the lowering of its political profile (at least as a major source of political controversy) had double edged implications for the department. Any threat to wind it up seemed to have faded into insignificance. But this also implied that its officers had to operate more like those in 'traditional' departments, fighting their own battles, reaching their own accommodations and negotiating their own partnerships, instead of being able to rely on an automatically sympathetic hearing from politicians when interdepartmental conflicts arose. The 'new' professionals either had to move on or had become more comfortably adapted to the local authority system. There was a substantial turnover of staff among the leading officers - with most Principal Development Officers going on to jobs elsewhere.

The council leaders had other political priorities which concerned them - in particular, manoeuvring to avoid the pressures of ratecapping and the maintenance of traditional services. Economic policy was no longer a central concern, and there was competition over limited resources with other departments. The effective change of political control which took place at the start of the 1980s opened up possibilities for new initiatives, which were taken up at the time and given organisational expression in the

formation of the Employment Department and its parent committee. But as the council returned to more 'normal' organisational life, within an increasingly hostile external environment, so the emphasis of leading politicians shifted towards the major departments whose committees they chaired, towards the problems of financial control and the possibilities of 'creative accounting' (see discussion of 'creative accounting' and left councils in Clarke and Cochrane 1989).

The work of the department became more routinised, frequently in projects working with other departments. Other departments had major claims to areas of activity which were crucial to the process of economic development. The most obvious of these were the Estates Surveyor's and Planning and Design Departments, whose roles were particularly significant once it was accepted that the council wanted to influence development in the private sector (as it did in the cases of Red Tape and the Lower Don Valley, despite starting points emphasising the role of the public sector). The merger of these departments in 1984 into a Department of Land and Planning increased their power within the council, as well as undermining the traditional conservatism of the old Estates Surveyors' department⁵. Although the planners frequently saw themselves as more

'entrepreneurial' than officers in the Employment Department, in practice, both sets began to move in similar directions at the same time, with a renewed emphasis on economic development finding formal expression in the changed title of the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED)⁶. In late 1986 a new Sheffield Development Office was set up, headed by a member of the planning department (who later became Director of Planning for the Sheffield Development Corporation), but also supported by DEED. The role of the Office was to act as a 'one stop' shop for potential developers and investors in Sheffield. In echoes of the justification given for the industrial development unit in the 1970s, it was described as providing a team to sell the city: "a team of experts to promote and market Sheffield as a centre of industrial and commercial investment" (City of Sheffield News, November 1986, p. 1). Some in the business community saw the setting up of the Development Office as the first evidence that the council had come to accept that it could not manage on its own, but required the support of the private sector (Fazey 1987, p. 15), but it was also a reflection of a changing balance of power within the council machinery, with the planners making greater claims to involvement in economic development once more.

Nationally, local economic interventionism became increasingly acceptable across a range of local authorities. It was no longer seen as a badge of dangerous radicalism, or, necessarily only associated with left Labour councils (see, e.g., Mawson and Miller 1986 for a discussion of the 'interventionist' policies of Labour local authorities which effectively offers a set of strategies suitable for wider use). At national level the Centre for Local Economic Strategies was set up in 1985, and soon became a forum through which many of the councils involved in economic development exchanged ideas and explored alternatives. Specialist publications, such as 'Local Economy' and 'Local Work', appeared to reflect the growing interest and training courses were increasingly offered through INLOGOV and SAUS, but also by new providers, including polytechnics, for example through the Local Economic Policy Unit at South Bank Polytechnic. Even central government encouraged such an interest by local authorities, albeit through enterprise agencies and Business in the Community rather than left Labour councils. In practice, however, it was often difficult to distinguish between the policies developed, and it sometimes looked as if central government was having to accept processes of change over which it had little control (see Ch 7 above).

In Sheffield these broader changes found a particular local expression, helped by the extent to which the Council had taken on economic policy as a central strand of its programme in the early eighties. This meant that it was able to respond to some of the changes within local politics more easily than was the case in some other places. Paradoxically, perhaps, although the policies of the early eighties had largely been defined as 'anti-capitalist', Sheffield seemed more able to respond to pressures for partnership with the private sector than those councils for which economic policy had been defined as outside their responsibilities. And it was increasingly accepted across a range of departments after the middle of the decade. 'Partnership' was the key feature stressed by the Council in the late 1980s.

Emphasising differences may understate the importance of continuity across the decade. With the benefit of hindsight it is easier to see that the changes at the start of the 1980s might have been part of a process which allowed local economic issues to be given a far higher political profile. Instead of being relegated to a small team of specialists, marketing land and premises, the creation of a new department brought a new legitimacy to the discussion of economic issues. The key break in Sheffield's politics,

in other words, can be seen to have been at the start of the 1980s, rather than the middle of the decade, because it was then that it became possible to move away from a principal focus on the work of the large spending service departments as the key definition of 'what the council did'. It raised the possibility of the council not only as a deliverer of services, but also as creator of a context intended to encourage development by others as part of a 'local growth coalition'. Although the phrase was not used by councillors or officers, the council was moving towards at least some of the features expressed in the term 'enabling authority', particularly if interpreted by the strategic managers (such as Brooke 1989a and b) rather than as interpreted by representatives of the 'new right' (such as Ridley 1988).

It is perhaps not surprising that the initial expression of this shift took the form it did. Sheffield's economic base was being eroded: within a Labour tradition, its old political leaders of the right could only be challenged from 'the left'. At national level, debates within the Labour Party were encouraging similar reappraisals of the leadership, and the growth of local socialism as an alternative to Thatcherism. The new officers were themselves products of those arguments and debates, and

represented challenges to the rather conservative methods of local economic development work. The challenges were initially expressed in ideological terms, but their impact was more important as a base for the forms of co-operation and collaboration in the second half of the 1980s, than it was as a developed model of socialism at local level (see Benington 1986, Cochrane 1988, p. 165).

The cases of the Red Tape Studios and the Lower Don Valley, outlined above, help to illustrate the extent of consistency between the early and late periods, leading to new forms of politics, but more general shifts were taking place. The shift towards increased business involvement in local state institutions was perhaps the most noticeable of these. The setting up of the Sheffield Economic Regeneration Committee (SERC) in 1987 was a reflection of this. This Committee (of 30 members) was made up of representatives from the Council, Chamber of Commerce, central government departments, the Council for Racial Equality, the University and Polytechnic, the local trade unions, the Church (the Industrial Mission), Members of Parliament, and BSC (Industry). When the Sheffield Development Corporation was set up, it too was given representation on the Committee. Despite its broader membership, this Committee was an

expression of partnership between business and the local authority.

The membership of SERC was not markedly different from that of the Industrial Development Advisory Committee which had existed in the 1970s, and like that committee it has no formal status as a body able to make decisions and commit resources, but its political significance is much greater. It was not merely an advisory committee to a relatively minor committee of the council (see Ch. 9) but became the focus of major debate about the direction of development for the city as a whole. As we have seen, it was SERC which commissioned the consultancy which seems to have led to the approval of an urban development corporation for the Lower Don Valley. And SERC also acted as a forum within which debates about Red Tape could take place outside the hothouse controversy expressed in 'rock on the rates' headlines. Since the creation of the Sheffield Development Corporation, SERC has acted as a vital arena through which the voice of 'Sheffield' can be expressed. Helen Jackson saw it as valuable space in which to persuade business and government departments to take on the arguments of the council, whilst, in the language of Business in the Community expressed by Richard Field, SERC was understood as a "sort of 'Board of Directors' for our city," which "became the city team"

(Field 1990, pp. 49 and 53). Its existence implied the acknowledgement that the council had a legitimate place in discussing strategy for the economic future of the city - that future was not merely the product of decisions on investment taken by firms in the private sector.

The move towards 'partnership' was not simply the product of changes within the council, but also reflected moves within the local business community, which were also consistent with wider moves encouraged by organisations such as Business in the Community (see Ch 5). Business interests were themselves beginning to take new initiatives, with some local commentators even referring to the "messianic zeal" of business leaders (Fogarty and Christie 1990, p. 91). The creation of SERC followed a meeting in 1986 (the Ranmoor Initiative) which brought together some 100 people identified as community leaders, including representatives of the church, the professions and the health service, as well as representatives of central and local government, industry and commerce.

The development of 'partnership' in the late 1980s can be seen as a reflection of the need for business to work with local government, as much as a reflection of a view within the council that the local authority needed to find partners. The business community was recognising

at local level - in a way that had been rejected by government at national level - that partnerships with the state and other organisations were useful in encouraging investment and generating prosperity. The importance of a small group of "movers and shakers" among local businessmen in encouraging the development of partnership arrangements is stressed by sympathetic commentators seeking to spread the Sheffield approach: "The names of Norman Adsetts, Richard Field, John Hambidge, Bev Stokes and Hugh Sykes are familiar to everyone concerned with business involvement in the Sheffield community. Between them, they are involved in all the key partnership ventures and business groups and form a high profile cadre of business leaders" (Fogarty and Christie 1990, p. 94).

Alongside the grand structures of SERC, others were also developed at this time. In 1987, Sheffield Partnerships Ltd. was set up, involving the council, the chambers of commerce and trade and the Cutlers' company, in order to promote the city⁷. From 1988 a regular bulletin ('Success in Sheffield') was produced by the Partnership, with a masthead proclaiming that it contained "NEWS about the **good** things happening in England's fourth city". Sheffield was said to be a "Partnership in action", which was expressed through a broad vision (Sheffield Vision) for the city. According

to this, Sheffield was or was to become a national centre for business and industry, Britain's new decision centre, a world leader in research and technology, an international centre for sport, leisure and tourism, and a city of life. A strategy involving a series of eight programmes of activity, ranging from policies for land use and physical development to policies for economic infrastructure and promotional campaigns, was identified to help realise these ambitions (Sheffield DEED 1987c). In 1988, despite the earlier (at least implicit) rejection of an enterprise board strategy, a local investment bank (Hallamshire Investments) was set up, led by the private sector, but including representation from the council on its board (Seyd 1990, p. 339).

In the early 1980s, Sheffield seemed to reject collaboration with central government. The refusal to bid for an enterprise zone was one expression of this. In practice, however, the extent of that rejection should not be exaggerated, and in time the council's officers became adept at drawing on central government schemes to support development. The use of Urban Programme funds to support Red Tape is one example, and before the arrival of the Development Corporation, investment in the Lower Don Valley also relied heavily on the Urban Programme. The development of the

Sheffield Science Park relied on close collaboration with the English Estates Corporation, and the management of the park involves representatives of private as well as public sector. And, of course, despite opposing the "undemocratic imposition" of the development corporation and a belief that its tasks could "have been done more effectively through existing local partnership arrangements" (Clive Betts, Leader of the Council, quoted in City of Sheffield News March 1988, p.1), the council managed to sign a partnership agreement with SDC in 1989, has representation on its board and seeks to work with it in a range of other partnership organisations.

Sheffield was also directly influenced by the policies of the European Commission with their stress on working with other agencies and those in the private sector. In the case of both the Lower Don Valley and Red Tape, the Council hoped to be able to call on European funds, but support had also been drawn on for the development of the Science Park. Sheffield was part of the Yorkshire and Humberside Integrated Development Operation (or IDOP) set up in 1989. IDOPs are a consequence of the way in which the European Commission now distributes its structural funds (including the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund). The EC

no longer makes any judgements about particular schemes, but, instead approves broad programmes (over five years) and leaves regionally based committees to decide how the funds will be distributed (see Preston and Hogg 1990 for a discussion of some of the problems for local government which have been associated with IDOPs). The South Yorkshire and South Humberside IDOP was one of the first approved in the U.K.. Each IDOP is overseen by a committee made up of representatives of central government (in this case led by the regional office of the Department of Trade and Industry), local government, the public utilities, local government and business. Proposals for particular schemes are considered by this committee in the light of the guidelines of the EC (a representative of the EC may also attend to ensure that these are met). But the key point is that they should involve partnership between the public and private sectors, or at least be supported by each, and such co-operation is institutionalised in the groups represented on the committee. So, at regional level, too, Sheffield is involved in partnership arrangements, with other levels of government as well as the private sector, and the existence of a parallel organisation at local level (SERC) gives them the advantage with controversial issues (such as Red Tape) that support can be made clear

relatively easily.

Outside the more obvious areas of economic policy, partnership was also developed. Sheffield was, in 1988, the first British city to have a wide contract drawn up between education and business as part of the 'Partnership in Action' campaign. The agreement was between the Education Committee, and the chambers of commerce and trade and the Cutlers' Company. It included a commitment by local companies to identify the skills needed by them, proposals to build networks between particular firms and individual schools, and agreement by the Education Department to prepare Records of Achievements for pupils going beyond records of examination to reflect the skills acquired by them. Sheffield's campaign to attract the World Student Games for 1991 was also understood as a partnership activity with the intention of making it possible to sell the city more effectively, and encouraging the development of facilities as part of a process of urban regeneration, particularly in the Lower Don Valley. A joint council/business delegation went to Zagreb as part of the process of bidding for the games in order to put Sheffield's case. The Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce commented that "the teamwork which has been displayed in making this bid to host the World Student

Games in 1991, is direct evidence of the power which can be generated when Sheffield gets its act together and it is that power which will be applied to many other initiatives in the coming months and years" (City of Sheffield News September 1987, p. 5). The process of preparing for the games, too, was intended to be largely private sector led in partnership with the public sector through an independent company (Universiade GB Ltd) but in practice the council was finally forced to take on more of an active part, both in terms of organisation and financial support. The World Student Games experience is indicative both of the power of the partnership notion and some of its practical weaknesses. The campaign for the Games drew business leaders in to the process of promotion, fitting in well with their support for civic boosterism (see, e.g., Field 1990), but was not able to draw on enough private sector funding to make them financially independent. Partnership leaves the local state (or sometimes the central state) to provide the infrastructure needed to sustain private sector initiative (see Darke 1991 for a fuller discussion of the implications of the World Student Games).

The 1980s in Sheffield have seen a dual process of change in the field of local economic policy, building on the ambiguity already apparent in the

early years of 'local socialism'. But the two sides are not necessarily contradictory. The first lies in the increased centrality of economic policy as an area of interest for local government; the second in the recognition that the council cannot achieve all its ambitions independently. At the end of the decade the acknowledgement that the local economy was a suitable focus for the attention of the Council was probably even clearer than it was at the start, but the form of involvement had moved more explicitly towards partnership models. At the end of the 1980s, the new politics of local economic policies were becoming clearer in Sheffield. They were based around a series of partnerships with the private sector, intended to manage economic change in ways which benefited both local industries and the local population. Politically, it encouraged the growth of bargaining and decision-making outside the traditional structures of local government, suggesting the possibility of new forms of governance at local level, based around the explicit representation of functional interests, rather than electoral representation. It is to the implications of such changes that we shall turn in the next chapter.

Notes

1. Interview with officers of the Sheffield Chamber of Commerce, 12/7/83.
2. Publications following this line include 'From the Ashes' (Sheffield City Council 1982 b), 'Steel in Crisis. Alternatives to Government Policy and the Decline in South Yorkshire's Steel Industry' (Sheffield City Council 1984b) and 'Electrify for Jobs. The Case for Rail Electrification' (Sheffield City Council 1984a). The latter was produced in collaboration with a series of local trade union organisations.
3. Internal memorandum to Employment Co-ordinator, 20/12/82.
4. This emphasis on the radicalism of the left's initiatives contrasts with the earlier conclusion drawn by Lawless and Chandler which places them more firmly in the tradition of Crosland and social democracy (see Lawless and Chandler 1985, p. 260, and discussion in Chapter 7 above).
5. The absorption (in 1991) of the department into that of Planning and Development (which had earlier absorbed the remnants of the Estates Surveyors' Department) was the final expression of this process, which both confirmed the move away from radicalism and the acceptance of many of the Employment Department's activities as a more 'normal' part of the

council's activities.

6. This process was reinforced by the transfer of staff from South Yorkshire County Council's economic development staff, with the abolition of the metropolitan counties in 1986, which was noted by Lawless (1990, p. 13). The arrival of these staff confirmed the shift already taking place, with a renewed interest in promotion, property and development, but they did not determine or create that shift.

7. The Sheffield Development Corporation was later also represented on the board.

Chapter 14. Conclusion: the scope of local politics

14.1 The lessons of Sheffield

As we have seen, it is widely accepted that the nature of urban politics in the U.K. has changed significantly since the mid 1970s. And there also seems to be agreement that it is important to place that change within a wider context. Some (including Jessop 1990b, Harvey 1990 and Stoker 1990) would argue that it needs to be understood as part of a more extensive move away from Fordism to some other set of arrangements or mode of regulation. Whilst these arguments are helpful in directing attention towards the significance of wider processes of restructuring, they are by no means conclusive and - in some formulations at least (see Chapter 6) may be actively misleading. It is, at least, not clear that the resolution of a crisis also necessarily implies a move from one global system (even if it is described as a mode of regulation) to another. More modestly, perhaps, it might at least be agreed that the crisis of the Keynesian welfare state which characterised the 1970s has resulted in a process of political restructuring at local as well as national and international levels. But the key features which characterise the new

arrangements and new political settlements at local level have been less clear, except in terms of broad generalisation. Some of these should have become clearer in the course of the preceding chapters.

The core of the argument of this thesis has been organised around an exploration of the implications and direction of Sheffield's changing economic policies across the 1980s. A justification for the use of a case study and of Sheffield in particular has already been given (see Chapter 9), but it is perhaps worth highlighting some of them again, because they help to point to the sorts of conclusions which can now be drawn. Until the end of the 1970s the municipal labourist tradition which was so important to the construction and maintenance of the U.K.'s local welfare state was dominant in Sheffield, too. Sheffield's local government history (charted by Blunkett and Jackson, K. 1987) fitted snugly within that tradition. Its experience in the 1980s, therefore, also provides a good example of the ways in which that state was restructured to move towards a different shape by the end of the decade. This is emphasised by a second aspect of Sheffield's recent experience, since the council had a particularly high profile in the 1980s, as one of the cradles of 'local socialism'. Its success or failure in developing a new set of initiatives can be seen as a strong case against which to assess arguments which stress the importance of

local autonomy or local democracy. If anywhere could be expected to be 'proactive' in the sense used by Cooke (1989a and c) then Sheffield could.

It is in this context that an uneasiness with the main ways of interpreting Sheffield's experience (see Chapter 11) becomes particularly important. If it is unsatisfactory to explain the process in simple terms as a move from 'left' to 'right' or from radicalism to entrepreneurialism, then what do alternative explanations consist of, and what implications do they have for our wider concerns about the development of urban politics? The conclusions of the previous chapter are simple enough, stressing both the extent of continuity across the 1980s and questioning the dominant interpretations of the 'break' which took place at the start of the decade. The 'break' needs to be defined differently, not so much in terms which stress the rise of local socialism as in others which point to a move away from the traditional approach emphasising the delivery of services within the welfare state towards one which more clearly and explicitly recognises the economic as a legitimate concern (even a major concern) for local government. Of course, in the past most local authorities (including Sheffield) provided a range of factory units and serviced land, but this shift went beyond that to herald an ideological as much as a practical change of focus. Without having a broader importance of this

sort, it is difficult to see why the change would have received quite the high level of attention which it did, locally and nationally: few would have argued that the local employment initiatives of the 1980s had much direct success in reducing levels of unemployment.

The ambiguity at the heart of Sheffield's employment initiatives has already been noted. In some respects they seemed to offer the possibility of collectively organised alternatives to capitalist development (or decline) but in others they suggested that they might be able to offer a more rational or better organised way of handling matters. In the context of U.K. capitalism in the 1980s - particularly as it found its expression in Sheffield - this increasingly meant that radical local government was pushed closer and closer to forms of 'partnership' arrangement. Here Jessop's argument about the state's necessary reliance on private economic activities as the main source of employment and prosperity (even at national level) highlights the difficulty faced even by radical councils such as Sheffield (Jessop 1990b, p.179-80). Turning towards economic policies in a situation when it had little independent control or power in the economic sphere meant that business was not only likely to be able to influence policy indirectly, but (in the context of the 1980s) that it was likely to do so more directly. Hudson and Plum argue that what they call

the deconcentration of economic policy to local level has increased the power of multinational companies to influence development (Hudson and Plum 1986), but this may underestimate the role of local government as local state in mobilising political support for change and restructuring at local level. The policies developed in Sheffield were not merely reactions to the demands of the private sector, but themselves helped to shape those demands, and make them possible (see Jessop 1990b, p. 167). The construction of a local growth coalition, in other words, was actively pursued by the local state (by officers as well as elected politicians) and would not have been possible without that commitment (Cox and Mair 1991; see also Savage 1987 who, in another context, stresses the ways in which the strategies of local political parties interact with class interests and help to shape the ways in which they are expressed at local level).

In part the shape taken by Sheffield's economic policies was a product of local social relations. The particular form of the city's tradition of local politics was rooted in its earlier economic development and the relationship which developed between the politics of labour in industry and in local government (see Chapter 9). The links between unions and council remained close long after they had been severed in other major English

cities, such as Birmingham. By the mid nineteen eighties, the symbolic references to steel city may have been more important than the reality, but they continued to influence local politics.

The resilience of Sheffield's political traditions is perhaps also reflected in the ways in which the transition between right and left was managed. As we have seen (in Chapter 10) the change was significantly smoother than in most other councils associated with the 'local socialism' (including the GLC, many London Boroughs and - at the extreme - Liverpool). In other words, it is important to recognise the particularity of Sheffield's political development and to acknowledge that one of the reasons for this was precisely the relationship between Sheffield's local politics and local social relations. Taking this further, it is also necessary to acknowledge the extent to which the shift which took place was itself also a reflection of the ways in which social relations were beginning to change. In part, this is to say nothing more than that the collapse of the steel industry represented a remarkable (locally experienced) external shock to which the local political system had to respond. But a consideration of the more subtle ways in which matters changed - with a rising importance for white collar and service employment and a gradual increase in women's participation in the labour market - suggests that, at the very least, the

political context changed.

Nor, however, were the political changes merely a product of local social relations. As we argued above, the construction of a local growth coalition was also the result of the active involvement of local government in shaping what was possible. This means that political change cannot easily be explained solely in terms of Harvey's 'structured coherence' or Duncan and Goodwin's 'local social relations'. In Sheffield, it is difficult to trace any clear line from changes in the labour market (i.e. from male manual employment to female service employment) to politics, although the changes which took place in the economy clearly set the context for political initiative. The local politicians (the councillors and Labour Party activists) were the product of a longer period of political formation and their responses to economic crisis reflected this, as well as reflecting wider shifts and tensions within the Labour Party. Equally important, however, was the role of the local state in shaping what was possible through its officers as well as elected politicians: the new officers carried with them an (admittedly confused and sometimes inconsistent) political programme which owed little directly to the Sheffield experience, and (although the high point of the 'local socialist' project was relatively brief) some of the initiatives they launched helped

provide the basis of the arrangements which came to dominate at the end of the decade.

The impressive rhetoric of the early 1980s in part reflected the more radical side of Sheffield's ambiguous commitment to 'local socialism', but it was also largely possible precisely because of the extent of recession, the severity of decline and its particular impact in Sheffield. Whatever the council had said at that time, it is unlikely that there would have been extensive public-private collaboration at the start of the decade, not least because there was little interest in investment or development from the private sector. As limited growth and possibilities of restructuring became clearer later in the decade, so the possibility of 'partnership' became apparent to both sides, too.

Our discussion of 'partnership' has tended to focus on direct interaction between business and other agencies in the field of economic development (admittedly broadly defined to include ambitious initiatives such as the World Student Games). But partnership has also developed more generally in other areas such as education, with agreements on curricula, course content, guarantees of standards and (in return) promises of jobs to school-leavers. Even in areas traditionally defined as those which are the responsibility of the welfare state, for example those associated with

inner city policy, have become more open to the involvement of business, particularly with the involvement of agencies such as Business in the Community. In Sheffield as in other British cities the welfare aspects of the local state are being fragmented with the emphasis shifting away from collective provision (and consumption) to individualised consumption, quality assurance and consumer charters.

The general pressures towards change - leading from the Keynesian welfare state to what Jessop has called the Schumpeterian workfare¹ state or what we have called the 'enterprise state' (see Chapter 6 above) - have taken particular forms in the case of the U.K.. Certainly since the mid 1980s and possibly from earlier in the decade in the context of attempts to restrict council spending, central government has encouraged the development of 'enabling councils', that is an approach to local government which emphasises its role in 'enabling' appropriate others (private or 'voluntary' sector) to deliver services. Some aspects of this approach have been taken up enthusiastically by politicians and officers at local level, often in ways which reinterpret the pressures and proposals from above. This has found reflection in the increasing fragmentation of the local welfare state, not only in the field of economic development (in which there has been a mushroom growth of different organisations) but also in

areas which have been more central to the traditional welfare state. Community care legislation, for example, promises the growth of a division between purchaser and provider, care manager and agencies being managed. Alongside this fragmentation the growth of business organisations has been encouraged, both by central government and - more significantly - by business groups themselves. In some cases, the new organisations themselves begin to look like expressions of local states (e.g. Training and Enterprise Councils) and hybrid organisations take on similar features (e.g., in the case of Sheffield they might include the Sheffield Development Corporation and SERC). The role of the European Community, too, should not be underestimated in encouraging the construction of new agencies. In the case of Sheffield the example of the South Yorkshire IDOP is an indication of the ways in which more regional structures may be developed. These changes begin to make clearer the extent to which it is necessary to speak of the local state (or states) rather than 'local government'. Local government as it is usually understood (i.e. as elected councils) is now only a part of the network of local state institutions - and in some areas of its work is no longer even the dominant one, despite the hopes of some strategic managers (such as Brooke 1989a and b). More important, perhaps, it also highlights the extent

to which it is necessary to view the local state as a set of social relations because the position of different interests within it are becoming increasingly (if not completely) transparent. In the past it was possible to start an analysis of local government with an extensive preamble about the local state as social relations, stressing that it could not be reduced to the institutions of elected local government, before going on to a detailed analysis of those institutions (e.g. Cockburn 1977). That is no longer possible.

Underlying all this in Sheffield, of course, are key changes within the local economy. There the old certainties of a permanent local industry based on steel have been substantially undermined, making it easier to construct a vision of economic growth based around alliances between employers, developers and local government (officers and politicians). As Cox and Mair and Harvey note, such alliances increasingly compete with each other around positive images of their localities, increasingly marginalising those who do not fit into the images. It is possible to define such activity as 'proactive', but - at least in the case of Sheffield - it looks more like desperation, and effectively narrows the range of political choice and political representation, even beginning to exclude trade unions and continuing to exclude groups such as women and racialised minorities,

except insofar as they are represented through elected local government (as the voice of the undifferentiated community).

Our consideration of Sheffield's experience highlights the extent to which locality matters to the development of local politics, indicating both its usefulness and its limitations. It enables us to return to and make judgements about some of the issues raised in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 . The ways in which Sheffield's economic policies developed suggest that some of the more exaggerated claims made by Cooke in his writing on localities (as 'centres of collective consciousness') are difficult to substantiate.

Sheffield's identity is more complex and contested than his arguments would allow. It is also clear that the complexity of the interaction between political developments within and outside Sheffield (including, for example, the insertion of radical professionals who were part of a wider national network) and the impact of global economic shifts allow only limited local autonomy. On the other hand, the arguments of those such as Harvey who suggest that local politics is necessarily conservative and limited also underestimate the extent to which it allows and indeed encourages active involvement and attempts to challenge dominant interpretations of what is possible. Similarly, the arguments of those such as Dunleavy who stress the structural context of political change, are in

danger of missing the subtle processes of interaction which shape the lived experience of local politics. There is a danger that starting from structural first principles simply writes off what is achieved in places such as Sheffield without looking at it more closely.

What happened in Sheffield was significantly different from what happened in similar Labour controlled authorities in the U.K. at the same time. In this sense, local politics clearly mattered. We have already considered some of the differences between the ways in which different 'local socialist' councils moved to the left and the differences between the programmes they adopted². And, of course, one might have expected the differences between some of the 'local socialist' authorities and other Labour authorities, such as Birmingham and Newcastle to be greater still. Certainly, a contrast was sometimes explicitly drawn between Sheffield and Birmingham (e.g. in Sheffield City Council Social and Economic Strategy Steering Group 1983). More interestingly, however, it is also instructive to consider some of the ways in which Sheffield's particular approach to partnership differed from those developed in other places. Similar language was being utilised by a range of councils in the 1980s, as well as by organisations such as Business in the Community. In Sheffield's case, as we have seen, the notion of partnership was shaped by the policies

of the Employment Department (and later DEED) and its associated committees. Before partnership arrangements were developed, the council had developed its own strategy. The strategy later adopted within partnership arrangements seems to have owed a great deal to that of the council, which has continued to take a leading role. Sometimes council officers and councillors have complained that their policies have simply been borrowed by others (such as the Sheffield Development Corporation) who have then taken the credit. But it may be more appropriate to point to the way in which this has continued to allow the council to influence what is possible - to take the lead position in a local growth coalition.

Elsewhere experiences and political arrangements are rather different, even if the language is similar (see, e.g., Sellgren 1990). In some places, it is clear that partnerships are being led by not by elected local governments but by specialist agencies, barely influenced by 'community' interests at least insofar as these are expressed through local elections. The classic example of this is probably the London Docklands Development Corporation (see, e.g., Docklands Forum 1991) but similar comments have been made about other urban development corporations, although the limited resources they have available to them suggests that they are unlikely to be able to be quite as dominant (see, e.g., Brayshaw 1990). New

town corporations seem to play a similar role, albeit with still weaker political 'partners' in local government. In Milton Keynes, for example, the lead position led to conflict with local councils, to the extent that the (Labour controlled) Borough Council supported the (Conservative) Secretary of State for the Environment's decision to bring the life of the Development Commission to a premature end in 1992, whilst the (Conservative controlled) Buckinghamshire County Council argued for an extension.

Elsewhere, particularly in smaller towns and cities and in places where there was no political challenge to the status quo at the start of the 1980s, stress seems to be placed on private sector initiative. This has been expressed in the mushroom growth of enterprise agencies. Authors such as Bennett lay great stress on the leading role of the private sector on the basis of their case studies (see, e.g., Bennett and Krebs 1990). Askew draws an explicit contrast between Sheffield and Wakefield where the partnership arrangements are rather more limited. There a deal has been done with one particular development company (AMEC plc) to undertake the joint development of specific sites. Although her conclusions are carefully modulated, it is clear that the orientation is rather different in the two places. In Sheffield, partnership is part of a

changed strategic understanding; in Wakefield the aims are rather more immediate - with simple targets for regeneration. Paradoxically, because the aims of partnership in Wakefield are more limited, it also seems that they may be more difficult to achieve. AMEC is in a more powerful bargaining position, precisely because it is not part of a wider partnership network (and a wider political vision) (Askew 1991).

The results of the ESRC's Changing Urban and Regional System research programme also highlight differences between the politics of the local economy in the different 'localities'. In Swindon, there has been a shift away from council led economic development towards an acceptance that development consortia are likely to play a major part in the planning and development of new areas (Bassett and Harloe 1990); on Teesside the old corporatist arrangements have been found wanting with the decline of the chemical industry, but it is unclear what is likely to replace them - ICI continues to have a significant political role, an urban development corporation encourages a focus on property development and the local council is left to manage high levels of local unemployment (Hudson 1990); in Cheltenham local authority strategies have reflected an alliance with the professional middle classes with development focused on anti-industrial prestige urban developments and the protection of the

town's regency image (Cowen 1990); in Thanet there is a continuing conflict between different business interests mediated through the local council which continues to promote tourism and port development, but also faces criticism over levels of spending from those outside the industry (Pickvance 1990); on Merseyside (Kirkby) the extent of business involvement is necessarily limited by the weakness of the local business sector and the lack of interest in development by the private sector, so that politics is more clearly oriented towards survival and community campaigning (Meegan 1990).

In Birmingham the relationship is different again. There, the City Council clearly has played a significant catalytic role and leading councillors have stressed their desire to make community gain from development, but it is clear that business organisations also see themselves as undertaking strategic planning for urban regeneration. Birmingham Heartlands, for example, has been set up as a private company, 65% owned by five development companies and 35% by the City Council. It now has the task of setting out a strategic planning framework, organising land-pooling and offering other assistance to the development consortia which are developing the main projects in a large area of East Birmingham (Carley 1991, pp. 107-109). Carley sums up the relationship positively,

concluding that it is "neither business-led nor public sector led, but is the result of balanced partnerships between the private sector, often led by the Chamber of Commerce, and the Birmingham City Council" (Carley, 1991, p. 114).

Until its dissolution at the end of the decade the Scottish Development Agency was the lead organisation in economic development in Glasgow, with the local councils doing little more than 'levering' money from it for their own pet schemes (Keating 1988, pp. 191-192). And it left an important legacy behind in the form of Glasgow Action, a business led agency with ambitions to encourage urban regeneration (see Keating 1988 pp. 186-191 for a discussion of the genesis of Glasgow Action). Like many other (although not all) business led approaches stress is placed on property development and local boosterism. In his discussion of Glasgow Action Boyle expresses concern that an important element in public-private partnerships of this sort is the emphasis placed on the "manipulation of the local regulatory and tax environments so as to stimulate private investment", public support for investment through grants, loans and subsidies, and the creation of "autonomous, executive, private public corporations" (Boyle 1989, p. 26). The final steps in this process have, he says, not yet been taken in Glasgow, where existing public

agencies have retained their responsibilities, but it is still a possibility which worries him. It seems more apparent in some places than others, particularly where the dangers have not been explicitly recognised by local politicians. If Glasgow and Birmingham are near one end of the spectrum, with their emphasis on the private rather than the public aspects of partnership, even at the end of the decade, Sheffield is clearly at the other.

The point of listing these examples is not simply to show that there are differences between political processes in different places (as, for example, Brindley et al 1989 also do very clearly in their survey of urban planning), although, of course, that is one of the reasons for doing so. It is also intended to show that utilising notions of corporatism (or post Fordism) do not solve the problem of defining local politics. Whatever the dominant sets of arrangements and the structural constraints which they create, there are still differences between the ways in which politics works in different places. And, more important perhaps, it is still necessary to go below the surface of official politics to understand the complexity and subtlety of the processes at work. The broad framework within which these need to be explored is set out in Figure 1 which is set out in Chapter 8. It is necessary to understand the ways in which a changing context for local politics is created by the operation of global and

notional political and economic systems, and the ways in which local actors set out to define their strategies within these constraints, within broader national (and, increasingly, European) policy networks. But it is also essential to understand the ways in which local arrangements themselves help to shape what is perceived to be possible (and therefore also help to determine what is possible).

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the extent to which local actions can themselves come to influence the wider systems within which local politics operate. In the case of Sheffield, the development of a wider acceptance of the value of 'interventionist' local economic policies at local level, e.g., through the growth of new policy networks, helped to generate new opportunities and at the same time to redefine what was appropriate (expressed in the caricature of a shift from radical to entrepreneurial politics across the decade). The notion of local corporatism provides a helpful starting point for analysis, but its precise implications need to be explored in different places, whether as a basis for understanding the operation of local politics, or as a necessary preliminary to active political intervention.

14.2 Theories of politics

The dominant approaches to the analysis of local government and the local state are partial and, therefore, also inadequate. The apparently untheorised 'stories' of local government studies, in fact implicitly or explicitly assume a democratic model in which voters elect councillors who then tell officers what to do - or at least provide them with policy guidelines within which to act. In this model officers act on behalf of their councils which, somehow, express the general will of the area in which they are elected. Not only does such an approach fit less and less well with a world in which there are many other institutional players in the local political game, but, of course, it finds it difficult to acknowledge the importance either of the structural position of local government within a wider (capitalist) state system or of networks of professional power and influence. Paradoxically, too, the discussions in local government studies frequently miss the importance of understanding the 'local' element in local government. This is acknowledged in general terms (local democracy is what justifies the existence of local government) but in practice there is little attempt to explore the implications of this, or to identify the social base on which political differentiation at local level might be based.

More structural approaches, however, with their emphasis on the role of political economy and on the local state as a 'capitalist' state tend to play down the importance of politics, electoral and otherwise. Because they explain developments in terms of the needs of (or tendencies of development of) capitalism, they find it difficult to explain how local political movements can achieve changes of significance. They underestimate the extent to which councils may be influenced by the local political and social contexts within which they find themselves. And they also often find it difficult to grasp the ways in which political negotiation within the state machine may influence political programmes and political accommodations. Like many approaches rooted in local government studies, structural approaches tend to underestimate the importance of locality - of locally based social processes. At best the local state becomes a site of mediation between national and local capital, or between capital and other social forces.

Increasingly, therefore, attempts have been made to develop an understanding of what makes local government local. But too often this has simply resulted in a picture of local politics which either implies that localities may themselves have more or less unified (proactive) political programmes or that there is a more or less direct relationship between

local social relations and local politics, reproducing at local level an error which has more frequently been made at national level, as every shift in party political support has to be explained by corresponding shifts in local social structures. Much of the analysis based around notions of 'locality', therefore has also tended to underestimate the independent weight of politics - including its ability to influence the ways in which people living in different places understand their social meanings - as well as frequently ignoring the position of the local state and developing narratives which are just as theoretically underdeveloped as those of local government studies. Its focus on the local also often effectively excludes other levels, except through asides or general acknowledgements. So, not only is the wider (economic as well as political) context of local politics not developed, nor is the significance of the state system within which local politics develops explored adequately. There is rarely any explicit acknowledgement of the importance of policy networks (as discussed by Rhodes) or the development of wider political programmes (such as the 'syndrome' of local socialism identified by Gyford) . If there were, it would be much more difficult to emphasise the separateness and particularity of local politics and the strategies which can be developed from them.

Despite these weaknesses, which will be familiar from the arguments in Chapters 2 and 3, each of these different approaches also has something to offer in the analysis of political change and it is on these positive contributions which we shall concentrate now, in an attempt to identify a more consistent way of developing the study of local politics.

It is possible to come towards local politics either from above or from below, but whichever route one chooses it is misleading to remain either at the level of global restructuring or the rich detail of particular cases. The dangers of simply describing local events and developing an apparently straightforward narrative are probably relatively clear because it either makes it difficult to draw conclusions across particular case studies or some shared framework is already implied without being spelled out sufficiently to be questioned. Moving from the global downwards, on the other hand, has the danger that everything discovered at local level (whatever it is) is simply seen to confirm shifts already identified at the global level. Nevertheless, it is probably easier to identify significant processes of local change with the help of some understanding of wider shifts. In this case, the context for local change is given by the debate about global economic and political restructuring following from the crisis of the 1970s (which some have called a crisis of Fordism). Insofar as this

has been a crisis of the Keynesian welfare state, it has also been a crisis for its local expression, and the new forms developing at local level may also be suggestive of some of the ways in which the state is being restructured.

But it is important to stress both that the global changes only provide context, and that the global context is itself the product of a series of adjustments taking place at local, regional and national levels in many places. The global, in other words, is not determinant. An understanding of local politics involves grasping the importance of a complex process of combined and uneven development which links local, national and global levels. In this context the sedimentary analogy is helpful in indicating how different rounds of economic development, social change and political formation leave legacies which continue to interact over time, helping to construct continuing traditions which shape political possibilities at local level. The weakness of the analogy is that it underestimates the importance of active political intervention to reshape what is possible.

As suggested in the previous section, the case of Sheffield helps to illustrate both what is possible and the constraints placed on local initiative. At the beginning of the 1980s, for a short time, it was possible to see how the launch of new initiatives was possible, in part because of

the absence of general legitimacy for the central government and the responses to the crisis of social-democracy (and of the Labour party in particular). Sheffield's local government made full use of this 'relative autonomy' to raise the possibility of a new political vision. But that vision was always an ambiguous one, never fully divorced from the past nor from the notion that it was possible to persuade capitalist concerns to behave more rationally. Its autonomy was, in any case, substantially restricted, above all by Sheffield's weak position within the British (and global) economy. Early attempts to intervene directly in the restructuring of industry failed because of this weakness. Later, however, the possibility of new forms of economic growth imposed their own pressures, as competitiveness between localities encouraged the council's officers to move closer and closer to business, financial and development interests through partnership and negotiation. Only through such arrangements did it become possible to deliver any progress.

Jessop emphasises the dangers of identifying a capitalist state and deducing from all the necessary features of politics from that definition. But he also stresses the ways in which states tends to construct themselves as capitalist because of their structural position within capitalism. He argues that the state is a social relation whose different

elements combine in ways which make it difficult - although not impossible - to escape from the dominance of capitalist interests (hence his emphasis on the notion of contingent necessity) (Jessop 1990b). These insights are particularly helpful in analysing the local state and local politics, when combined with arguments which have come from more locally (or locality) focused research (of the sort discussed in Chapter 3). The case of Sheffield in the 1980s whilst showing some of the possibilities of moving away from narrow definitions of the capitalist state, also shows some of the ways in which capitalist states form themselves and define themselves. The capitalist state may not be a machine, which can be controlled by those who take power in it through elections or appointment, but it can be pushed in unexpected directions for limited periods at least, even if the tendency is likely to be in the opposite direction, towards the accommodation of business interests. Following the arguments of Gurr and King (1987) and King and Pierre (1990), it may be useful to distinguish between two forms of autonomy for local states - the first of which refers to autonomy of local economic and social conditions and the second of which is concerned with autonomy from higher levels of the state. In Sheffield's case, it could be argued, that it proved possible to build a base of independence from the centre, but was less easy to escape

from the requirements of locally based economic interests. More positively, it might be suggested that the Council's ability to develop a locally based economic strategy meant that it (unlike some other councils) was also able to operate as a genuine 'partner' rather than merely a creature of business interests.

The argument of this thesis has been that an adequate understanding of the processes of local politics is not possible without bringing together some of the key features of debates which focus on the local state and those which focus on notions of locality - debates within the disciplines of sociology and political science on the one hand and geography on the other. It is also necessary to utilise arguments from a range of theoretical approaches. Most obviously, there is a need to bring together (neo-pluralist) arguments which stress the significance of policy networks, with those (marxist) arguments which emphasise the importance of processes of economic and social restructuring. There is, of course, a danger of sinking into unconvincing eclecticism if espousing a multitheoretical approach merely leads to haphazard borrowing from all over the place with little underlying consistency. The danger can be avoided, however, as long as there is a degree of clarity about theoretical starting points, and the extent and nature of theoretical borrowings is

adequately acknowledged and justified. In this case, the strength of marxist approaches to the analysis of the state provides the starting point, but the need for those approaches to incorporate rather more subtle understandings of political processes in practice provides the conclusion. Even if the accusation of eclecticism is one which can still be made, this is a risk well worth taking if it enables us to move beyond the set piece battles of the social sciences in which arguments can be dismissed simply because they originate from one position or another. Without moving out from behind our defensive ramparts it is impossible to understand either the complexities or possibilities of local politics, either as an object of study, or as an arena for action.

This is particularly important at the start of the 1990s. Local government in the U.K. is moving into a new and uncertain period of change. Some of its main features - including forms of local corporatism, public-private partnerships, managerialism and new definitions of welfare - are becoming clearer, however. Some of them have been explored above, in the context of a discussion of local economic policies. But the restructuring of local states is taking place on a much broader basis, raising questions about how the local welfare state should be analysed in the future. The arguments of this thesis are not just relevant to the

analysis of economic policy, but provide an important foundation on which to build in undertaking that analysis.

Notes

1. Jessop's formulation is not intended to imply the narrow definition of workfare which is often taken from the U.S. model (i.e. that the payment of benefit depends on the acceptance of employment on some makework scheme) but a rather broader one in which the orientation of the state shifts away from social welfare towards the need to encourage the competitiveness of particular (possibly local) capitalist economies, particularly through economic innovation (these comments are drawn from a presentation made by Bob Jessop to the Urban Change and Conflict Conference, Lancaster, 1991. There was no written paper).
2. Some of these differences are discussed in Cochrane 1988. The abolition of the metropolitan county councils in 1986 helped to reinforce their significance, as the enterprise boards created in the early part of the decade tried (not all successfully) to find secure routes to survival (see Cochrane and Clarke 1990). Some - such as the West Midlands Enterprise Board - stressed that they wanted to be regionally based development

agencies (on the Scottish Development Agency model); others, such as Yorkshire Enterprise presented themselves as regionally based merchant banks (see, e.g. Gunnell 1990). Even the board with the most radical reputation, the Greater London Enterprise Board (which became Greater London Enterprise or GLE), redefined its position substantially to confirm its commitment to partnership (see, e.g., Minns 1991).

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